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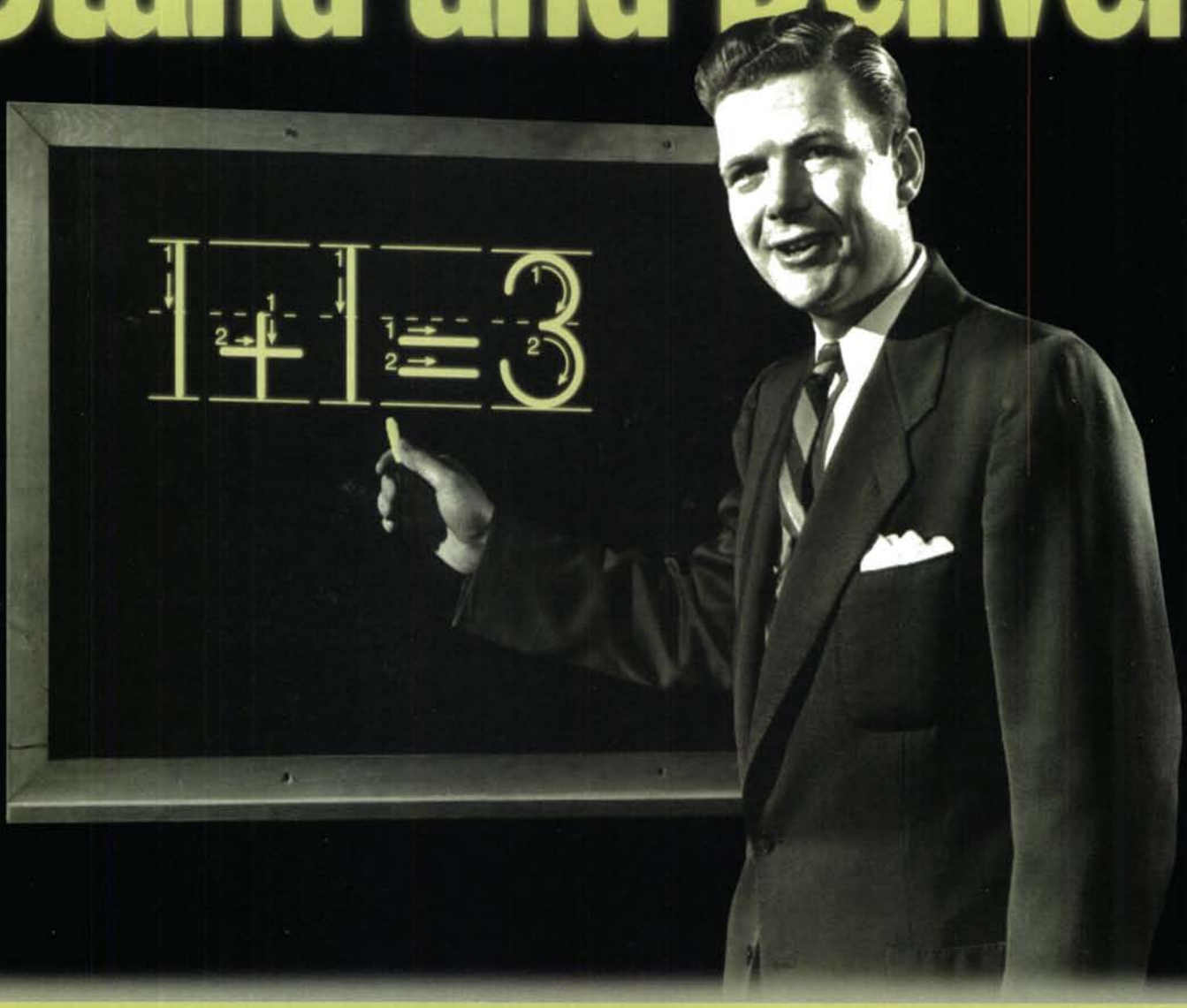

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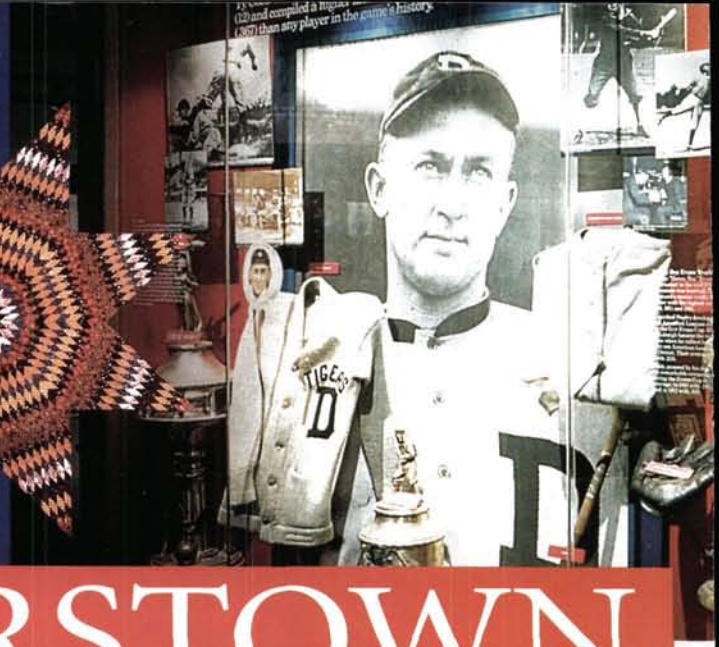

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A Weekly Journal of Opinion

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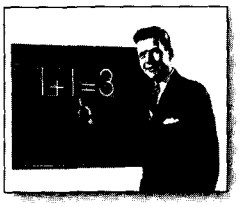

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CORRESPONDENCE

Venting

To the editors:

Regarding Michael Lewis's Campaign Journal on Ralph Nader ("The Normal Person of Tomorrow," May 20): Nader's consternation that cars no longer come with the convenience of side vent windows is a perfect example of the hard tradeoffs confronting society as a result of the kind of big government regulatory power Nader has for so long championed. Congress mandated back in the 1970s that cars get better gas mileage, so auto manufacturers were forced to make cars lighter. One of the first personal conveniences they abandoned in order to provide for the common good of meeting federal gas mileage standards was the bulkier door frame that housed the little front vent window Nader today pines for. While Nader sees government regulation as a way of increasing the choices offered to consumers, the truth is that regulation, as it seeks to strike a blow for the greater safety of society often at the expense of a particular personal freedom, can have the effect of limiting individual choice.

DON FOX
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

From hero to eternity

To the editors:

Eugen Weber misrepresents my *The World of Samuel Beckett, 1906-46* ("The Anti-Hero as Hero," May 6) in order to reinforce Deirdre Bair's view and demonstrate his own dubious speculations about Beckett. My intent was to challenge, not reinforce, the prevalent image of Beckett as reclusive and self-absorbed and to describe the events that affected this gentle, modest and active man during his formative years.

Weber is consistently misleading and inaccurate. Saying that I do not make enough of Beckett's early involvement in the Resistance is simply untrue. With regard to Beckett in Roussillon, when he worked with the *maquis*, Weber prefers Deirdre Bair's colorful image of a neurotic Beckett. Laurence Wiley, however, Bair's alleged source of that image, vehemently denies this representation of his information in taped conversations with me. Most troubling, Weber mixes my observations with his own distortions. He refers to Beckett's "long crush" on Joyce. I speak, rather, of Beckett's idolization of this artist and father figure. Weber calls Beckett a drunk and refers frequently to his mother-fixation—his and Bair's contention, not mine.

Weber also criticizes me for such errors of "omission" and "commission" as not indexing Beckett's wife—untrue: see p. 244, with eight references; or misrepresenting the British "means" test and *L'Humanité*—where my information is supported by well-respected historians. I do not rely upon Weber—himself an historian.

Finally, Weber is entitled to criticize my style, but ought one not take pause when he chides Beckett's, with comments like "a bit ungrammatical, but clear enough"?

LOIS GORDON
New York, New York

Liberal interpretation

To the editors:

At long last, thanks to Matthew Cooper ("Liberals for a Day," May 20), we finally have a surefire test to determine what are the "liberal" and "conservative" positions on any question. According to Cooper, the test is very simple: whether one takes the side that supports "compassion" and "empathy."

Thus, in Cooper's prime example, Senator Pete Domenici is a "liberal for a day" because he supported parity for physical and mental health problems but has been "less than empathetic" on other welfare issues. By that standard presumably Senator Ted Kennedy (who voted against parity) is therefore a "conservative for a day."

Similarly, Cooper finds great inconsistency in the "compassionate" positions of conservatives like Senator Alan Simpson (for supporting parity) and George Will (for supporting disabled children). On Cooper's theory, I guess that any true-blue conservative would be indifferent to the sick and disabled and would always opt for the "Scrooge" position on any issue.

Then, in the case of Senator Mike DeWine, Cooper goes even further. He credits DeWine with a "liberal awakening" by opposing an increase in the 55 mph speed limit—an issue far more regional in nature than liberal-conservative.

Cooper claims that these "liberals for a day" were affected by personal experiences. But to some degree that's true of all of us—liberals and conservatives and all varieties in between—and one can't help but wonder what was Cooper's personal experience that led

AGAINST THE TIDE

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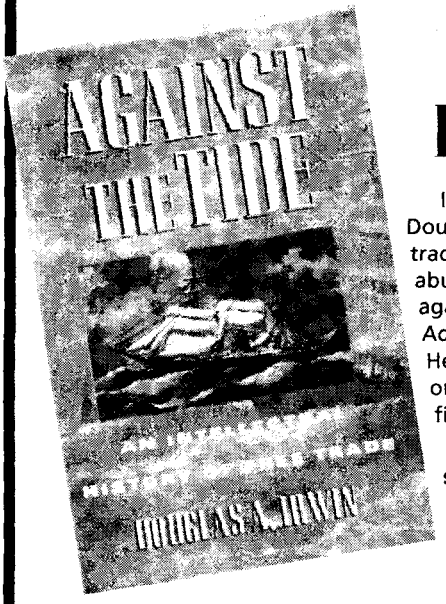
Douglas A. Irwin



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him to his black-and-white view of the political process.

EARL E. POLLOCK
Longboat Key, Florida

Spy vs. spy

To the editors:

Okay, so Mark Frankel has convinced me that placing cameras in an employee's shower is bad ("Candid Camera," May 20). But he ignores the distinction between monitoring work and spying on employees when he goes on to complain about a legal loophole "that permits companies to monitor employees' calls for 'business purposes' " and to quote disapprovingly from a specialist who works with companies where " 'the boss monitors that line to make sure the employees don't have a nasty tone with the customers. . . .' " In many businesses, an employee's only observable output is talking on a phone or typing on a computer terminal. In a purely electronic workplace, supervision has to be purely electronic, too.

NOAH MEYERSON
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Assault and battery

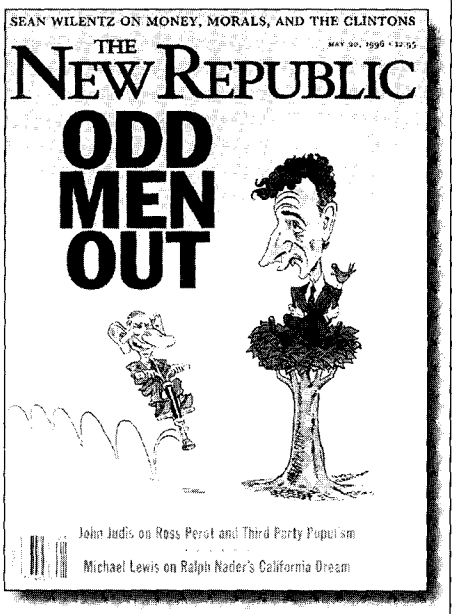
To the editors:

TNR's assault on opponents of mandatory HIV testing of newborns (Notebook, May 20) may be good copy, but it is bad science. For reasons that should be obvious to any layman, testing newborn babies for the presence of HIV—after they have been infected—will not "save lives," as you insist it will. In fact, not a single life will be saved by such a testing program, but many lives will be disrupted, and many women, mostly poor, mostly black or Latina, will be made even more wary of the health care system and even more reluctant to enter therapy.

What a program of universal testing would do is permit earlier intervention, before an infant exhibits overt signs of HIV infection. Unhappily, it is not yet clear from the clinical evidence if early intervention has a significant impact on survival, and there is no consensus among experts on HIV disease to support your assertion that "the earlier treatment is started, the better the baby's chance of fighting off the virus."

Readers of TNR may not appreciate that opposition to the mandatory HIV testing of newborns goes well beyond the "AIDS activists" vilified by the author of your Notebook item—unless by "AIDS activists" you mean to include the vast majority of the scientific community. True, some of those scientists are swayed by what you plainly perceive as a finicky regard for privacy rights—including the rights of pregnant women—but most oppose universal HIV testing simply because it will do far more harm than good.

What will save lives is the identification of HIV-positive women during the early months of their pregnancy—at a time when antiretroviral therapy can dramatically reduce the likelihood that they will transmit the infection to their offspring. What is needed is a bipartisan bill that will cover the costs of counseling all pregnant women, encouraging them to be tested—voluntarily—for HIV, providing them with appropriate treatment if they test positive for the virus and assisting them in raising their children. Until the day when Congress proposes such a bill, it is the opponents of such measures, rather than the opponents of mandatory



testing, that you should accuse of giving "AIDS to dependent children."

EDWIN BAYRD
New York, New York

Stone cold

To the editors:

I'm writing in regard to your film critic Stanley Kauffmann's review of the motion picture *Last Dance* ("Striving and Contriving," May 20). In his review, Mr. Kauffmann contends that the picture's director, Bruce Beresford, "worked a small miracle with" its star, Sharon Stone, and that "there are colors in [her] performance, shades of self that I've never seen."

This is my point. Mr. Kauffmann, usually a perceptive and sensitive critic, is way off the mark here. Those of us who have followed Ms. Stone's career since her breakthrough role in *Basic Instinct* want to see her not doing a Meryl Streep turn, but flirting, taunting, sashaying, sizzling, cracking wise and, in general, being the Sharon Stone we've come to know and love. Bruce Beresford is indeed an exceptionally talented director, but, in going the Great Actress route, Ms. Stone is not displaying her strengths. Where, oh, where are Paul Verhoeven and Joe Eszterhas now that we—and Ms. Stone—need them?

DUANE BROOKS
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Trading with the enemy

To the editors:

Charles Lane's "Re-Orient" (May 20) praising the "new" U.S.-Japan security agreement announced at the summit meeting between President Clinton and Prime Minister Hashimoto contained a flagrant inaccuracy. Lane cited my criticism of the cosmetic changes in the "mutual" alliance with Japan as an example of reactions by "America's Japanophobic trade hawks."

I am willing to ignore Lane's naïve conclusion that a promise by Japanese officials to provide nonlethal supplies to U.S. forces in peacetime and to "study" the possibility of providing logistical support (not troops) in an East Asian conflict constitutes a serious change in the U.S.-Japanese relationship. I am even willing to ignore his silly characterization of the Cato Institution as isolationist. But I am not willing to ignore his implication that I am a Japanophobe and a trade protectionist. My frequently expressed argument that U.S. officials need to overcome their irrational fear of Japan's playing a significant military role in East Asia hardly suggests anti-Japanese sentiments. The notion that I am a trade hawk is even more absurd. I am on record as favoring not only free trade, but unilateral free trade. Lane may have an argument with Pat Buchanan and Ross Perot on the issue of protectionism; he has none with me.

TED GALEN CARPENTER
Washington, D.C.

The TNR myth

To the editors:

Jennifer Bradley is courted by a modeling school ("The Beauty Myth," May 20). Michael Lewis's wife is a Bloomingdale's model ("Scenic Beauty," October 3, 1994). TNR is evidently a magnet for babes; how come your male editors are inveterately grumpy? More importantly, can I get an invite to the next office party?

ROBERT GORTON
Berkeley, California

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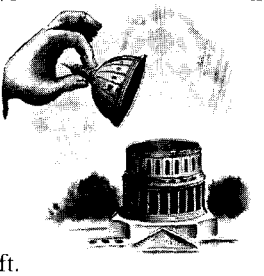
FROM WASHINGTON

The heretic

When a British journalist asked me recently if I still considered myself part of the left, I replied that I still share its commitments to democracy and equality but don't feel any connection to the identity politics and post-structural obscurantism that seem to dominate it today. Out in the suburbs where I live, I'm usually not even aware that "the left" exists, but then something happens that reminds me how truly pernicious it can be.

I first met Ron Radosh in 1974, when he wrote an article for a journal I helped edit called *Socialist Revolution* (now *Socialist Review*) on the formation of Michael Harrington's Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee. It was a provocative article, believe it or not, because people in our corner of the left were not supposed to look kindly upon Harrington, who had castigated SDS in the early '60s for its ties to communists. Radosh's was the first article to suggest a rapprochement.

In the mid-'80s, when I was in New York researching a biography of William F. Buckley, I used to see Radosh a lot, and in Maryland now we're almost neighbors. We don't talk politics that much because we have such different interests. (I still have trouble pointing out Nicaragua on a map.) But I've always maintained a grudging respect for his opinions. I say grudging because I don't usually agree at first but find out later—whether on the guilt of the Rosenbergs or the sins of the Sandinistas—that he was right. I think of him as the Cassandra of the American left.



I haven't read Radosh's latest book, *The Amerasia Case: Prelude to McCarthyism*, but I am one of the few who have read his first two—*American Labor and United States Foreign Policy* and *Prophets on the Right*. These, along, of course, with *The Rosenberg File*, should have earned him a reputation as one of the foremost historians of twentieth-century America. I can't think of anyone who has had a greater impact on how we understand the clash over America's response to communism in the Truman era. But when I talk about Radosh with left-wing historians they tell me he's not a historian at all. One editor swore that Radosh was a CIA agent.

I think this view results from the sectarianism of today's left. The radical left, like the radical right, is properly understood as an offshoot of early Protestant Congregationalism, with its witch trials and visible saints and its reliance on the interpretation of sacred texts. Radosh is hated because he is a heretic rather than a pagan. The left can dismiss someone like David Horowitz, who has simply abandoned the ideology of the left for that of the right. But Radosh is troubling because he has not repudiated the historic left of Eugene Debs, Norman Thomas, the CIO and the civil rights movement, even though he has nothing but contempt for its current claimants.

One way to deal with heretics is to pretend that they are pagans—CIA agents or covert right-wingers out to subvert true faith. That way you don't have to confront their ideas. ("I wouldn't hire a redbaiter like Ron," pronounced one historian I know. Redbaiter? Because he identified Julius Rosenberg as a communist agent in 500 pages of scrupulous scholarship that has since been confirmed by National Security Agency intercepts?) Another strategy is to wish them dead. I still remember the reaction in 1974 when Radosh, after a trip to Cuba with other Fidelistas, revealed in *Liberation* that Castro was putting homosexuals in mental hospitals and authorizing lobotomies for mental patients. After the article appeared, I heard one movement leader in San Francisco proclaim that Radosh should be killed.

Radosh has certainly paid a professional price for his heresy. While colleagues on the left were chairing departments at Columbia or CUNY and enjoying sabbaticals at Stanford's social science think tank or at the Rockefeller Foundation's villa in Bellagio, Italy, Radosh was teaching four classes a semester of fifty students each at Queensborough Community College in New York. He wrote his Rosenberg book on unpaid leave. At times, he was on the verge of being hired by a major university, but then I'd hear from one of my (gleeful) left-wing historian friends that Radosh had been blackballed because of

continued on page 41

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JUNE 17, 1996

STARR SEARCH

The rhythms of Whitewater have become as predictable as the change of seasons. First, a new "development" catapults the story to the front page. News organizations scramble the jets, putting their political reporters and investigative teams on the case. (What editor, after all, wants to be blindsided should the case lead to criminal charges against the president and the first lady?) And, just as predictably, when the incident fails to lead to anything like a legal charge against Bill or Hillary Rodham Clinton, the story again fades from view. Reporters, at that point, are content to write that Whitewater "could" erupt, and then leave the case alone, only to return to it with dizzying alarm months later.

Interest in Whitewater has just spiked again. The guilty verdicts dispensed by an Arkansas jury against erstwhile Clinton business partner James McDougal, his former wife, Susan, and the governor of Arkansas, Jim Guy Tucker, have sparked another Whitewater feeding frenzy—although, it should be said, each of the three will appeal the verdict. Suddenly, Whitewater has gone from sedative to scandal. *Are the president and the first lady done for? Who'll get indicted next?* It's time for everyone to take a deep breath. Whitewater, despite the gyrations of the press, has yet to be proven a presidency-destroying cataclysm, as those on the right charge; nor can it be dismissed, as Democrats are wont to do, as mere fluff.

What is Whitewater? By now, the probe stretches over time and distance from the original purchase of vacation property in the 1970s to contemporary activities in the White House. Several investigations are, of course, under way. The Senate Whitewater Committee continues its work as does the House's Government Reform and Oversight Committee and Special Counsel Kenneth Starr. Jim Leach's House Banking Committee may renew its inquiry. The Senate inquiry, led by the ethically challenged Alfonse D'Amato, has proven particularly tedious. After months of inquiry, the best that D'Amato and his counsel, Michael Chertoff, have come up with is The Case of the Missing Billing Records. Were these records of the billable hours Mrs. Clinton devoted to McDougal's Madison Guarantee deliberately hidden? Perhaps. But it should be noted that the records tend to corroborate Mrs. Clinton's story. They showed her doing only a modest amount of work for Madison.

Starr's inquiry, on the other hand, has proven fruitful. Those who have criticized the former solicitor general for engaging in a witch-hunt should think again. Starr has now convicted a sitting governor, something that has only happened nine times in our country's history. He's made a convincing case to a jury about the McDougals' fraudulent business practices. But will Starr find wrongdoing on the part of the Clintons themselves? For the moment, there's simply no proof that he will. Indeed, it's premature, at the time of this writing, to say that the jury convicted Tucker and the McDougals *because* they believed the charges of the government's main witness, David Hale. Hale has maintained that then-Governor Clinton buffaloed him into granting a Small Business Administration-backed loan to Susan McDougal. (Hale and Clinton told conflicting stories during the trial.) But the requests made by the jury during its lengthy deliberations showed that they were more interested in the McDougals' paper trail than in the word of the president versus that of the convicted felon Hale. The jury's foreman even told ABC that Clinton's credibility was not an issue. Other jurors have echoed that sentiment.

It's worth remembering, too, that other inquiries have turned up no evidence of criminal activity on the part of the Clintons. The extensive inquiry conducted by Republican Jay Stephens on behalf of the Resolution Trust Corporation failed to find anything actionable in the original land deal that the Clintons and the McDougals cut—no proof that the Clintons committed graft or fraud. And, while James Stewart's terrific *Blood Sport* paints an unsettling picture of Arkansas cronyism, it uncovers no criminal wrongdoing by the president and the first lady, save the possibility that they overvalued their assets on a loan application.

It's worth rejecting the cycles of hysteria and lassitude for something more reasonable: patience. Let's see where Kenneth Starr goes with his inquiry. He seems to have found traction. It would have been better if Starr's appointment had not been surrounded by controversy. And it seems crazy that he retains private clients at a time when he ought to be devoting his energies to Whitewater. Nevertheless, Starr has proved himself a serious man, capable of securing indictments. All but the most rigid partisans should watch the rest of his inquiry with respect and, above all, calm. •

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PROPERTY WRONGS

Even in Bob Dole's jackhammer syntax, it sounds pretty straightforward. As he told the National Association of Realtors several weeks ago, the government "can take your property in many ways.... We say, 'All right. If that happens, if that's necessary ... then there ought to be compensation.' Not very complicated." But government regulation of private property for the public good—and how to determine if a regulation constitutes a "taking," an economically devastating restriction—is, in fact, an extremely complicated issue, and the Dole-sponsored Omnibus Property Rights Act, soon to be taken up by the Senate, is a dangerously simplistic way of addressing it. By undermining the ability of federal agencies to regulate property, it resurrects the blind, anti-government zealotry of last year's Congress.

The bill mandates compensation if a regulation reduces the value of a portion of property by 33 percent. Defenders argue that this will ensure that the burdens of regulation and environmental protection are shared by everyone, not just hapless landowners. They trot out beleaguered farmers and widows who tell sad tales of property overregulated to the point of worthlessness. The report on the bill introduces a Utah woman whose land was "seized" for an airport expansion in Provo and who was paid below market value because "unbeknownst to her, the Army Corps of Engineers had arbitrarily classified part of her property as a wetland." Another Utahan's property was favored by endangered tortoises, which resulted in "a precipitous drop in the market value of the property."

What's wrong with compensating people whose land the government diminishes in value? First of all, it's based on a flawed principle: people simply don't have the right to wring every last dollar from their land. Think about zoning laws, which often limit lucrative uses of an individual's property. A two-acre suburban plot might turn a handsome profit as a porn shop, but very few municipalities would allow it to be used as such.

If Dole's bill is bad in theory, it's worse in practice, an open invitation to silly lawsuits. Its definition of property is so broad that virtually any inhibition on use—an actual use or one that's just a gleam in an owner's eye—could be grounds for compensation. Currently, a landowner has to apply for a permit to build and be rejected (which happens only rarely), or face some other real loss, before litigation can begin. If Dole's bill passes, landowners will be able to file suits based on losses that they have never, in fact, incurred. They can simply claim that regulations forbade something they *intended* to build. Even if the government wins in court, the fight takes time and money. If it loses, the compensation costs come out of an agency's operating budget.

Dole and his backers (mainly timber, mining and grazing interests, along with real estate developers and assorted senators, including Hank Brown, who accepted more than $200,000 from those industries' PACs over five years) deny that the bill encourages trivial lawsuits. They note that a piece of property must be devalued by a significant amount—33 percent—to require compensation. But that's a phantom threshold, because it only applies to an "affected part," not the entire property, and, as many critics have noted, any "affected part" can be defined so as to be wholly taken. And then there's the nuisance exception, which says that government action is not a taking if it would prohibit a nuisance. This, proponents claim, will safeguard people whose neighbors pollute their backyard and protect farmers from crop diseases that devour across property lines.

It would be nice to think so. But nuisance law varies from state to state. In Massachusetts, for example, nuisance law doesn't protect people from groundwater contamination from spilled chemicals. In most states it doesn't cover cumulative or long-term damages. Worst of all, nuisance law only kicks in after harm has been done, rather than preventing it from happening in the first place as federal agencies seek to do.

The president has threatened a veto. That's reassuring. But it shouldn't let the bill's sponsors off the hook, especially when one of them is running for president himself. In fact, Dole told the realtors association as much: "[W]e've got the bill ready for Senate debate.... We want senators and House members to vote on it so you will know, in the 1996 election, where people stand on issues of importance to you." Thanks. The GOP obviously thinks takings is a winning issue. But, regardless of whether or not they're in fashion, regulations *are* important. The irresponsible actions of one person can hurt others, and a community has the right to demand standards of conduct. In fact, Republicans make this very point when talking about people on welfare. Well, the same logic applies to land and business owners—including the large timber and mining companies pushing this bill. •

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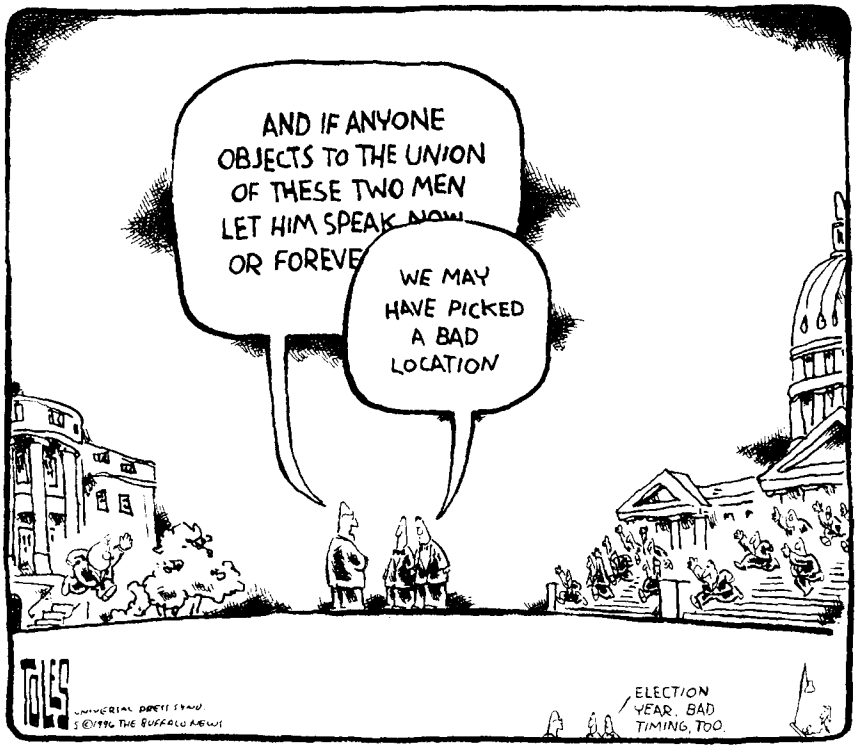
NOTEBOOK

BLOCK HEADS: President Clinton's embrace of the radical Wisconsin welfare plan (see "Tommy's New Tune," by Mickey Kaus, September 18 & 25, 1995) presented Washington's liberal antipoverty establishment with a moment of truth, of sorts. Ever since Clinton was elected pledging to "end welfare as we know it," the erstwhile defenders of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) have assumed a chastened, moderate air, suggesting that, yes, they know welfare should be reformed, that of course recipients should work rather than collect checks. This was particularly true of the two leading antipoverty think tanks, the Center for Budget on Policy Priorities (CBPP) and the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP). Both groups have criticized Republican "block grant" proposals on the grounds that they do not provide enough money to pay for the child care and last-resort public jobs necessary to move AFDC's single mothers into work. ("Work Initiatives for Welfare Families Placed in Jeopardy," warned one CBPP release.) The block grant bills, CBPP and CLASP noted, actually allowed states to slash spending on the poor. But Wisconsin doesn't propose to slash spending; its plan would increase spending by 13 percent, from already-generous levels. Wisconsin says it is willing to pay for subsidized child care and last-resort government jobs for every family that needs them (not just those who now qualify for AFDC). The state will even offer subsidized health coverage to all poor families. So how did the CBPP and CLASP react? They quickly called a press conference to trash the Wisconsin plan. Some of their criticisms fell into the reasonable-but-remediable category, but others were holdovers from the bad old days of liberal pro-welfare militance. CLASP attorney Mark Greenberg complained that "families with four or more members" would get slightly less aid under Wisconsin's plan than they do now under AFDC—as if welfare reform must never result in anyone, anywhere, suffering any reduction in benefits. The clear implication was that, when it matters, even these seemingly chastened antipoverty liberals cannot bring themselves to support requiring welfare recipients to work, even with generous government supports in place. They fear the Republican block grant bill, not because most states will fail at replacing welfare with work, but because some states, like Wisconsin, might succeed.


AND IF ANYONE OBJECTS TO THE UNION OF THESE TWO MEN LET HIM SPEAK NOW OR FOREVE
WE MAY HAVE PICKED A BAD LOCATION
TOLES
ELECTION YEAR. BAD TIMING, TOO.

BEYOND LEFT AND RIGHT: Among the less enlightening questions raised about last week's Supreme Court Colorado decision was: How could a conservative like Anthony Kennedy oppose affirmative action and yet be in favor of a liberal cause like gay rights? The question merely reminds us how useless the terms "liberal" and "conservative" have become. The case against affirmative action and against Colorado's Amendment 2 are exactly the same. Both require the state to protect or attack a group defined by an involuntary characteristic. Colorado's amendment argued that homosexual citizens, merely by virtue of being homosexual, should be denied equal protection of the laws and permanently excluded from legal protections everyone else takes for granted. Affirmative action does the same thing in reverse. It grants members of a particular racial group, merely by virtue of their membership in that group, special preferences that others do not have. In different ways, the government is dividing Americans by the color of their skin or the orientation of their hearts, and this, the Court wisely affirmed, the government should not do. Basic liberties should apply to all citizens equally, without regard to things they cannot and need not change. We never expected Anthony Kennedy to make the case so eloquently.

DON'T SAY WE DIDN'T WARN YOU:

Stocks will rise or fall, or rise then fall, or fall then rise or fall and fall

—Baltimore's *Sun*, May 12.

(With thanks to Eileen Obrien of Baltimore, Maryland.)

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The polygamy diversion.

THREE'S A CROWD

By Andrew Sullivan

It wasn't that we hadn't prepped. Testifying on the Hill was a first for me, and those of us opposing the "Defense of Marriage Act" had been chatting for days about possible questions. But we hadn't quite expected this one. If a person had an "insatiable desire" to marry more than one wife, Congressman Bob Inglis of South Carolina wanted to know, what argument did gay activists have to deny him a legal, polygamous marriage? It wasn't a stray question. Republican after Republican returned gleefully to a Democratic witness who, it turned out, was (kind of) in favor of polygamy. I hastily amended my testimony to deal with the question. Before long, we were busy debating on what terms Utah should have been allowed into the Union and whether bisexuals could have legal harems.

Riveting stuff, compared to the Subcommittee on the Constitution's usual fare. But also revealing. In succeeding days, polygamy dominated the same-sex marriage debate. Both Bill Bennett and George Will used the polygamy argument as a first line of defense against same-sex marriage. In *The Washington Post* and *Newsweek*, Bennett in particular accused the same-sex marriage brigade of engaging in a "sexual relativism" with no obvious stopping place and no "principled ground" to oppose the recognition of multiple spouses.

Well, here's an attempt at a principled ground. The polygamy argument rests, I think, on a couple of assumptions. The first is that polygamous impulses are morally and psychologically equivalent to homosexual impulses, since both are diversions from the healthy heterosexual norm, and that the government has a role to prevent such activities. But I wonder whether Bennett really agrees with this. Almost everyone seems to accept, even if they find homosexuality morally troublesome, that it occupies a deeper level of human consciousness than a polygamous impulse. Even the Catholic Church, which believes that homosexuality is an "objective disorder," concedes that it is a profound element of human identity. It speaks of "homosexual persons," for example, in a way it would never speak of "polygamous persons." And almost all of us tacitly assume this, even in the very use of the term "homosexuals." We accept also that multiple partners can be desired by gays and straights alike: that polygamy is an *activity*, whereas both homosexuality and heterosexuality are *states*.

So where is the logical connection between accepting same-sex marriage and sanctioning polygamy? Rationally, it's a completely separate question whether the government should extend the definition of marriage (same-sex or different-sex) to include more than one spouse or whether, in the existing institution between two unrelated adults, the government should continue to discriminate between its citizens. Politically speaking, the connection is even more tenuous. To the best of my knowledge, there is no polygamists' rights organization poised to exploit same-sex marriage to return the republic to polygamous abandon. Indeed, few in the same-sex marriage camp have anything but disdain for such an idea. And, as a matter of social policy, same-sex marriage is, of course, the opposite of Bennett's relativism. Far from opening up the possibilities of multiple partners for homosexuals, it actually closes them down.

Bennett might argue, I suppose, that any change in marriage opens up the possibility of any *conceivable* change in marriage. But this is not an argument, it's a panic. If we're worried about polygamy, why not the threat of legally sanctioned necrophilia? Or bestiality? The same panic occurred when interracial marriage became constitutional—a mere thirty years ago—and when women no longer had to be the legal property of their husbands. The truth is, marriage has changed many, many times over the centuries. Each change should be judged on its own terms, not as part of some seamless process of alleged disintegration.

So Bennett must move to his next point, which is that homosexuals understand the institution of marriage so differently than heterosexuals do that to admit them into it would be to alter the institution entirely. To argue this, he has to say that gay men are so naturally promiscuous that they are constitutively unable to sustain the monogamous requirements of marriage and so fail to meet the requirements of membership. He has even repeatedly—and misleadingly—quoted my book, *Virtually Normal*, to buttress this point.

Bennett claims that I believe male-male marriage would and should be adulterous—and cites a couple of sentences from the epilogue to that effect. In context, however, it's clear that the sentences he cites refer to some cultural differences between gay and straight relationships, as they exist today *before same-sex marriage has been made legal.* He ignores the two central chapters of my book—and several articles—in which I unequivocally argue for monogamy as central to all marriage, same-sex or opposite-sex.

That some contemporary gay male relationships are "open" doesn't undermine my point; it supports it. What I do concede, however, is that, in all probability, gay male marriage is not likely to be identical to lesbian marriage, which isn't likely to be identical to heterosexual marriage. The differences between the genders, the gap between gay and straight culture, the unique life experiences that divide as well as unite heterosexuals and homosexuals, will probably create an institution not easily squeezed into a completely uniform model. And a small minority of male-male marriages may per-

continued on page 12

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Credit is due

The full faith and credit clause is about to become the Constitution's hottest provision. Found in Article IV of the original Constitution of 1789, its first sentence provides that "Full Faith and Credit shall be given in each State to the public Acts, Records, and judicial Proceedings of every other State." This guarantee makes our lives in a mobile polity easier, assuring that local driver's licenses, birth certificates, marriages and divorces are recognized all around the country.

But the provision is about to be put to a historic test. It is likely that sometime in the next two years Hawaii will recognize marriage between gays or lesbians. In anticipation, nine states (and counting) have adopted legislation to block their courts from giving full faith and credit to Hawaii same-sex unions. The last time so many states declined to recognize marriages performed elsewhere was the Southern refusal to accord full faith and credit to different-race marriages. But, in 1967, the Supreme Court held that such discrimination against different-race marriages was unconstitutional. Today, at least in part out of constitutional obligation, some states recognize "incestuous" first-cousin marriages if they are legal in the state where the couple married (as is the case in eleven states and the District of Columbia).

Other states refuse to recognize incestuous marriages, however, basing their refusal upon a suggested "public policy" exception to full faith and credit obligations. The Supreme Court has not definitively ruled on the legality of a public policy exception. But the Court's insistence in *Romer* v. *Evans* that animus against gay couples is not a legitimate state interest, much less an important public policy, suggests that a state could not invoke it to deny acceptance of same-sex marriages recognized in another state.

Normally, the Supreme Court is the arbiter of constitutional issues such as full faith and credit. But in this case Congress may step in. Section 2 of the Defense of Marriage Act, introduced last month by Representative Robert Barr of Georgia, Bob Dole and others, would relieve states from giving full faith and credit to "any public act, record, or judicial proceeding respecting a relationship between persons of the same sex." The bill is on a fast track, probably too fast for any but an election year.

Responding to arguments that Congress cannot take away constitutional rights, the bill's sponsors point to the second sentence of the full faith and credit clause: "And the Congress may by general Laws prescribe the Manner in which such Acts, Records and Proceedings shall be proved, *and the Effect thereof.*" (My emphasis.) But does the authority of Congress to "prescribe the Effect" of state marriages mean that it can take away constitutional rights? I am aware of no provision of the Constitution that has been so interpreted. Is the second sentence of the full faith and credit clause the exception that proves the rule?

The Framers of the Constitution didn't think so. The first sentence of the clause was adopted from a similar provision in the Articles of Confederation. The second was added by James Wilson and others at the Philadelphia Convention. Wilson argued that "if the legislature were not allowed to declare the effect the provision would amount to nothing more than what now takes place among all independent nations." States in our polity, he contended, must recognize one another's records and judgments not simply as a matter of discretion, but of right—and the Convention agreed with him.

The Framers, in other words, intended the full faith and credit clause to have real bite, and did not expect Congress to use the phrase "prescribe the Effect" to defang it. That is precisely the way Congress has implemented the clause for 200 years. In statutes adopted in 1790 and 1804, Congress added statutory authorization to give effect to the clause and to make it applicable to any court in the United States. It did nothing further for six generations. In 1980 and 1994, Congress legislated particular rules (consistent with constitutional requirements) to assure full faith and credit for child custody and child support orders. Never in the nation's history has Congress invoked the "prescribe the Effect" sentence to undermine the guarantees of the full faith and credit clause as interpreted by the courts. Unless the Defense of Marriage Act merely implements a valid public policy exception, it raises grave constitutional concerns. And the public policy advanced by the bill, as the Supreme Court said in *Romer*, does not justify testing the limits of congressional power.

The sponsors of the Defense of Marriage Act see marriage as an endangered institution, and indeed it is—by high divorce rates, above all. Furthermore, the full faith and credit clause must shoulder some of the blame, though not in the way the bill's sponsors imagine. The full faith and credit clause and its federal statutory codification require that quickie divorces in one state be recognized in other states, including those seeking to preserve more lasting marriage ties. This has created a race to the bottom in which states with the loosest divorce rules (such as Nevada) have become national magnets attracting spouses looking for easy exits from lifetime commitments. If the sponsors of the Defense of Marriage Act really wanted to defend marriage, they would seek to negate full faith and credit for Nevada divorces (a legal threat to marriage currently in place), not for Hawaii same-sex marriages (a future scenario that poses only a hypothetical threat).

And, if Dole and Barr are really interested in protecting the institution of marriage against immoral unions, there are other, more appropriate, targets for their indignation. Under Virginia law, for example, a man who rapes and impregnates a 14-year-old girl can be relieved of his crime if he then agrees to marry the girl and her parents consent. Such a "rapist marriage" would then be recognized in other states. Why not defend against "rapist" and "child molestation" marriages? Eleven states permit first cousins to marry, and other states routinely recognize these marriages. Why not defend against them?

Election-year demagoguery yields notoriously poor legislation, and the Defense of Marriage Act is no exception. But the reasons to hesitate before adopting this legislation are conservative ones: federalism (marriage issues are usually resolved at the state level), original intent (the Framers didn't intend Congress to have the power to derogate from the full faith and credit clause) and tradition (Congress has never done so). Perhaps the best reason is the most conservative: same-sex marriage would lessen alienation between gay and straight America and allow lesbian and gay couples to embrace family values.

WILLIAM ESKRIDGE

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haps fail to uphold monogamy as successfully as many opposite-sex marriages. But what implications does that assertion have for the same-sex marriage debate as a whole?

Bennett argues that non-monogamous homosexual marriages will fatally undermine an already enfeebled institution. He makes this argument for one basic reason: men are naturally more promiscuous and male-male marriages will legitimize such promiscuity. But this argument has some problems. If you believe that men are naturally more promiscuous than women, then it follows that lesbian marriages will actually be more monogamous than heterosexual ones. So the alleged damage male-male marriages might do to heterosexual marriage would be countered by the good example that lesbian marriages would provide. It's a wash. And if you take the other conservative argument—that marriage exists not to reward monogamy but to encourage it—then Bennett is also in trouble. There is surely no group in society, by this logic, more in need of marriage rights than gay men. They are the group that most needs incentives for responsible behavior, monogamy, fidelity, and the like.

I'm not trying to be facetious here. The truth is, I think, marriage acts both as an incentive for virtuous behavior—and as a social blessing for the effort. In the past, we have wisely not made nit-picking assessments as to who deserves the right to marry and who does not. We have provided it to anyone prepared to embrace it and hoped for the best.

Imagine the consequences if you did otherwise. The government would spend its time figuring out whether certain groups of people were more or less capable of living up to the responsibilities of marriage and denying their right to it on that basis. The government might try to restrict it for more sexually active men under 20; or for women who have had an abortion. The government could argue, grotesquely, that because African Americans have, in general, higher illegitimacy rates, their right to marry should be abrogated. All these options rightly horrify us—but they are exactly the kind of conditions that Bennett and those who agree with him are trying to impose on gay citizens.

Or, in an equally troubling scenario, we could put conditions on the right to marry for certain individuals. People with a history of compulsive philandery in their relationships could be denied the right to marry; or people who have already failed at marriage once or twice or more; or people who are "free-riders" and marry late in life when the social sacrifice of marriage isn't quite so heavy. If we imposed these three restrictions, of course, three leading proponents of the Defense of Marriage Act would have their own right to marry taken away: chief-sponsor Congressman Bob Barr of Georgia (married three times), Bill Bennett (married at age 39) and Bill Clinton (ahem).

So how's this for a compromise: accept that human beings have natural, cultural and psychological differences. Accept that institutions can act both as incentives and rewards for moral behavior. Grant all citizens the same basic, civil institutions and hope that the mess and tragedy and joy of human life can somehow be sorted out for the better. That, after all, is what marriage does today for over 90 percent of the population. For some, it comes easily. For others, its commitments and responsibilities are crippling. But we do not premise the right to marry upon the ability to perform its demands flawlessly. We accept that human beings are variably virtuous, but that, as citizens, they should be given the same rights and responsibilities—period. That—and not the bogeymen of polygamy and adultery—is what the same-sex marriage debate is really about. •

MANAGUA POSTCARD

THAT'S AMORE

By Charles Lane

The new Nicaragua is indeed a different country from the one Sandinista President Daniel Ortega bequeathed to Violeta Chamorro after his defeat in the 1990 elections. The media are more uninhibited and more diverse in their opinions than ever before. The privatized supermarkets sell Aunt Jemima frozen waffles. The hottest new restaurant is the Managua franchise of Subway. The Sandinista People's Army has shrunk to 14,500 men, abandoned its Soviet-issue fatigues for U.S.-style uniforms made in Taiwan and morphed into "the Army of Nicaragua." Daniel Ortega's brother Humberto has retired as commander of the armed forces. Carlos Carrión, the former Sandinista mayor of Managua, manages a Shell station. With another election due on October 20, Daniel Ortega's running mate is a 68-year-old rancher, and he takes advice on economics from former dictator Anastasio Somoza's ex-Central Bank chief.

There is no better place to observe the plasticity of Nicaraguan political culture than the brand-new European Bank of Central America, known by its Spanish initials, BECA. BECA's modern brick building is a beehive of ostensible activity: attractive women in grey blazers attend constantly ringing phones; sober-faced young men fill out forms. Upstairs, the bank's director, Alvaro Robelo, barks Italian into a cellular phone and generally exudes Euro-sophistication.

Surrounded by framed watercolors of the Piazza Navona and other Roman sights, Robelo regaled me with his private-sector "Marshall Plan" for what, despite the recent mini-boom, is still the hemisphere's poorest country, save Haiti. As a dual Italian-Nicaraguan citizen, Robelo boasts that he will use his wealthy Italian contacts to build an interoceanic canal across the coun-

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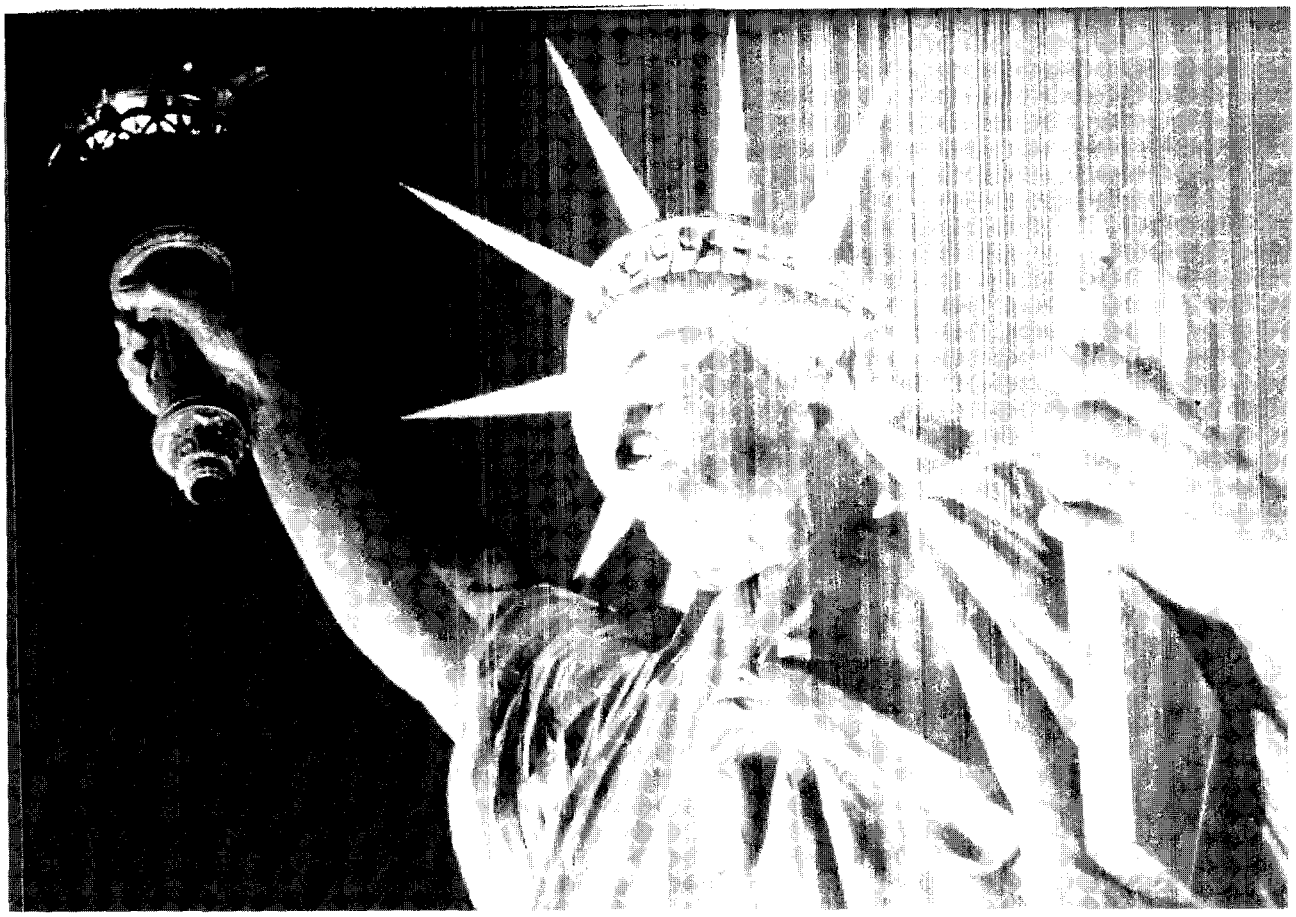

It takes all kinds.

The tired. The poor. The huddled masses yearning to breathe free.

From every corner of the world, from every race, faith, culture and creed, we have come or been brought to America. Separately and together, we have dreamed of freedom. And in America, as nowhere else on earth, we have made the dream of freedom real.

But today, that common dream of freedom, that common pursuit by a diverse people of a stronger and fairer America, is challenged. In the media, in the halls of Congress, on the campaign trail and in the streets, angry voices echo distressingly familiar calls to divide America into "us" and "them" along ethnic, racial, religious and other lines. The well-being of American democratic pluralism — in which each of us holds an equal stake in our nation's future — is in question.

At the American Jewish Committee, we have worked for 90 years to safeguard that essential ideal of pluralism. The task is critical. Too easily and too often, the delicate cords of law and civility that bind society have frayed, setting group against group. When those cords snap, all are threatened; indeed, the essence of America is imperiled.

Join us in the cause of keeping America safe from the haters and dividers. Join us in the vital, daily enterprise of ensuring America fulfills its promise of freedom, justice and mutual respect for all.

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ANONYMOUS

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try. To clinch the deal, he is running for president himself. "I'm a patriot kidnapped by the people," he explains. So far, polls show Robelo running a surprising third behind the popular conservative Arnoldo Aleman and Ortega. Many Nicaraguans seem to regard this buoyant little globalist as an apolitical alternative to both the Sandinistas and their conservative foes—a Nicaraguan Silvio Berlusconi.

The analogy, alas, turns out to be all too apt. Just as Berlusconi ultimately got caught up in the very corruption scandal he had initially exploited, the gnomic Robelo is not quite as public-spirited as he first appears. Remember, this is a man who boasts of political connections in *Italy*. Now 49, he left Nicaragua for Italy as a teenager and stayed out of his home country's affairs until 1988, when he was appointed representative of the Contra rebels in Rome. He parlayed that sinecure into another as Chamorro's ambassador to Rome—but was quietly sacked in 1992 for selling false diplomatic license plates to Sicilian *mafiosi*.

At around the same time, Robelo's Italian political *padrino*, former Socialist Prime Minister Bettino Craxi, ran afoul of Italian justice. Craxi fled to Tunisia; many of his cronies surfaced in Nicaragua as business confederates of Alvaro Robelo. None of their ventures has ever quite lived up to Robelo's hype. Robelo and Gabriele Pilliterri, a fugitive from Italian justice, tried to launch a hydrofoil service on Lake Nicaragua using Russian boats and pilots imported from the Crimea. The enterprise flopped when the Russian pilots skipped town complaining that they hadn't been paid.

But Robelo fell back on his bank and his presidential campaign, and all appeared well—until April, when an Italian prosecutor revealed that Robelo was a cog in Operation Phony Money, a preposterously grandiose $12.5 billion Rome-based money-laundering scheme masterminded by Girolamo "The Professor" Scalese. Seems the plotters were obtaining false certificates of deposit at complicit banks around the world, then using them as collateral to obtain letters of credit elsewhere. Those "clean" loans would then be reimbursed with the "dirty" proceeds from stolen art, drug sales and God knows what else. The conspirators were supposedly planning to use BECA to concoct a fake deposit of $970 million—almost as much money as there is in the entire Nicaraguan banking system.

Robelo denied even knowing "The Professor" and blamed the charges on "geopolitical interests" opposed to his canal. Nicaraguans, indifferent to the origins of Robelo's wealth but hopeful that he might put some of it to work in their country, seemed to buy his story—until Italian prosecutors produced a tape recording of a recent conversation between Robelo and "The Professor." Now the supreme electoral council might void Robelo's candidacy.

Then again, it might not. Why, you may ask, did Robelo provoke scrutiny of his operation by running for president in the first place? It seems to have been part of some murky deal he has with the Ortega brothers, who still wield behind-the-scenes influence in Nicaragua—in the police, especially, but also in the electoral council. The Ortegas' cooperation is therefore vital to the smooth operation of a venture such as that envisioned by Robelo and his Italian friends. The Sandinistas, whose support barely exceeds 20 percent in the polls, can't win in October. But, if Robelo siphons off enough votes from Aleman, there could be a runoff in which Robelo would throw his support to Ortega.

One oft-cited piece of evidence for this scenario is the conspicuous silence maintained by the Sandinista newspaper *Barricada* on the Robelo scandal. Robelo has also been going around town referring to Daniel Ortega, whom he cultivated when Ortega used to pass through Rome en route to visit Arab potentates, as his "good friend." The chief of security for BECA is a former Sandinista cop, Roger Ramirez, who was recently bounced from the force because the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration fingered him as an associate of known traffickers. Ramirez owns part of a hotel on Corn Island—a Nicaraguan territory in the Caribbean used as a refueling stop for Colombian drug flights headed north. His partner is an Italian ex-con who recently got caught trying to obtain a phony Nicaraguan passport with Robelo's assistance.

Of late, Senator Jesse Helms has been raising a fuss about the pending elections in Nicaragua, charging that Sandinistas in the Army and the police will prevent former Contra supporters in the violent countryside from registering and voting. No doubt Helms will soon be demanding an investigation of the Robelo shenanigans, too, which could lead to more entertaining disclosures. But I'm betting these elections will proceed about as smoothly as others in poor Latin American countries—not perfect, but broadly reflective of the people's will. The Sandinistas are too unpopular to win, no matter how many tricks they pull. And one fine day Nicaraguans will awaken to the news that BECA has closed, its deposits have vanished, and Alvaro Robelo is on the lam in Cuba, livin' large.

The Robelo phenomenon isn't so much a threat to political development as it is a reminder that Nicaragua's history, though sad, has also been leavened by more than its share of sheer goofiness. Once again little Nicaragua finds itself involved in far-flung international conspiracies that implicate the high and mighty of other nations. But the context is not a revolution to transform human nature, or the struggle of anti-Communist rebels morally equivalent to the Founding Fathers—just a money scam so byzantine that it could only have happened in the same volcanic wonderland that sucked in William Walker, Howard Hughes and Ollie North. Thus does post-revolutionary Nicaragua live out an article of its erstwhile official Marxist faith: that all historical events occur twice, first as tragedy, then as farce.

CHARLES LANE traveled to Nicaragua on a USIA grant.

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ON THE HILL

TUMBLING DICE

By Michael Crowley

In the shadow of the mighty Mirage Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas looms a towering man-made volcano. To the accompaniment of squawking gulls and a thunderous rumble, the synthetic mountain erupts every fifteen minutes in a plume of fire and smoke, wowing gamblers between their bets and setting ablaze a surrounding artificial lake. It's all in keeping with the wacky extravagance of the Mirage, one of the titans of the lucrative American casino industry. In April, when the Mirage hosted a profitable GOP fund-raiser attended by House Speaker Newt Gingrich, it touched off a different sort of eruption: an angry protest by Christian conservatives that laid bare the latest Republican battle over social virtue. Although gambling may not have the political resonance of, say, abortion, it has sparked internecine warfare in a party that is increasingly showing its fault lines.

Gingrich's visit (during which he attacked the Clinton administration as "based on the P.T. Barnum theory [that] there's a sucker born every minute," in apparent obliviousness to the profession of his hosts) raised $70,000 for Nevada Congressman John Ensign, one of the party's freshman phenoms. The Speaker's appearance came at an especially anxious moment for the casino operators—just as Congress was debating whether to establish a commission to investigate the explosion of gambling in America. Speaking before an audience of casino-owning potential donors, Gingrich couldn't resist throwing them a bone—support for a provision to emasculate the commission—that the Christian Coalition would soon make him retrieve.

The independent commission, which the House has voted to establish (and a Senate committee has also been debating), would compile a definitive report on gambling in the U.S. The industry has spread through forty-eight states—an expansion powered by Native American-run bingo parlors, riverboat casinos and state lotteries—and its revenues (i.e., the money that bettors lose) have quadrupled over the past decade to $40 billion per year. Americans now gamble away more money each year than they spend on movie, theater, opera and concert tickets combined.

Christian conservatives aren't the only ones raising doubts about this exponential growth. Paul Simon has been the Senate's champion of the gambling commission bill, which also has the support of many liberal newspapers and pundits. And a growing number of skeptics argue not only that casinos are magnets for crime and alcoholism, but that they siphon money from local businesses and depress local economies, as well.

But, if these other critics of gambling worry mostly about its regressive economic impact, for the religious right—surprise—gambling is an issue of family values, which makes it a potent issue indeed. In a letter to Alaska Senator Ted Stevens, who chairs the committee handling the bill, Christian Coalition head Ralph Reed wrote that "the message of 'get rich quick' with 'lady luck' is at direct odds with the foundation of our work ethic, which is based in part on hard work, perseverance, and lawful behavior as the way to achieve our success." An independent study is necessary, Reed wrote, to assess gambling's impact on "our nation, our economy and more importantly, our families."

No one really opposes the idea of a commission. The dispute is over the panel's power to subpoena casino records during its probe. A boldfaced dictum in Reed's letter expressed the view of the anti-gaming forces, that "removal of all subpoena powers would severely limit the commission's effectiveness and render it useless." While the industry is known to have conducted profit-maximizing studies, gambling opponents hint at the existence of insidious profiles of addicts and plans to exploit them—potential smoking guns that might prove casinos rely on addicts for a disproportionate amount of their revenue. If they exist, the studies could ignite a public relations China Syndrome for the casino business, reminiscent of the documents allegedly showing that the tobacco industry "spiked" cigarettes.

In response, industry lobbyists have labeled the commission "an inquisition and a witch-hunt" and tried, à la the tobacco industry, to cast the issue as one of civil liberties. "You could go to Las Vegas for a weekend, having fun and spending money, and your records could be subpoenaed," says Kelley Gannon of the American Gaming Association (AGA), the powerful lobby established last year by the industry. Gannon warns that the records could incorporate anything you buy at the hotel where you've gambled—including room service, pay-per-view or goodies from the gift shop. "If you took two $1,000 loans from the 'house' you could be asked to explain that. Well, why should you have to, if you choose to relax and enjoy yourself?"

It's a disingenuous counterattack. The commission has no reason to drag in gamblers as witnesses. Just as tobacco executives, and not smokers, have been called before congressional panels, it will be casino owners who are asked to explain their business practices. (Hoping to stem the turning PR tide, the AGA is creating a "National Center for Responsible Gaming,"

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which it says will award grants for studies of underage and problem gamblers.)

The casinos have also stacked the deck in their favor at the political table, and for Republicans like Gingrich crossing them is an unappealing prospect. The AGA puts the squeeze on Congress with chief lobbyists Frank Fahrenkopf, who once chaired the Republican Party, and Ken Duberstein, former Reagan chief of staff and heavy-about-town. It's not just that the industry generates vast revenues (estimated at around $1.4 billion annually) and employment (over 1 million people) for states in every region. Gambling interests also lavish millions in contributions each year—about $2 million worth in the last electoral cycle—on lucky politicians. Bob Dole's presidential campaign, for instance, was almost half a million dollars richer after a 1995 fund-raiser thrown by Steve Wynn, chairman of the board of Mirage Resorts. Wynn was also Gingrich's dinner partner the night before the Ensign fund-raiser. Gingrich's opposition to the commission's subpoena power, which he bruited at the Mirage fund-raiser, represented a surefire way to keep the checks flowing to Ensign and others.

But, while casino donations may be at stake for Gingrich and Dole, the two cannot easily ignore the power religious conservatives exert within the party. Gingrich's pro-casino, anti-subpoena line was rather quickly modified by a call from Ralph Reed, who warned that ditching the subpoena authority would antagonize his flock. Soon after, Reed told *The Washington Post*, Gingrich's aides assured him that their boss wouldn't intervene on the bill.

It wasn't the only time the Christian Coalition had entered into the gambling fray. Last month, Paul Simon accused the AGA of strong-arming a Senate committee into gutting the commission's subpoena power. Nevada Senator Richard Bryan shouted back that a "Christian right agenda" was driving the bill and complained to the *Post* that neither Gingrich nor Dole "wants to get into a cross-fire with the Christian Coalition." (For Bryan and fellow Nevadan Harry Reid, expected to defend the interests of one of their state's heartbeat industries, answering to their constituents must have felt like telling dad they'd totaled the car.)

Last month the Christian Coalition and its anti-gaming allies sealed their victory when Stevens's committee finally spat out a bill that, like the House version, grants subpoena power. Both sides expect it to come up for a vote imminently and to stay intact through conference. The Nevadans have abandoned the fight, and, with Dole and Gingrich showing no signs of intervening, the commission will likely be established this summer. Ralph Reed is a happy man.

Do Christian Coalition officials ever fear their stubbornness might alienate allies in Congress? "There have been some grumblings," concedes Heidi Stirrup, the coalition's director of government relations. But she says they don't worry her: "I really think we're on the side of the angels on this one." •

Why I won't live in Barrytown.

LEAVING D.C.

By Debra Dickerson

I am not from D.C. Like everyone else I know here, I'm a well-educated, well-paid (by D.C. standards) transplant who came in pursuit of a cool job and a place in the power elite. The only D.C. natives I'm aware of interacting with are the security guards with four-inch nails and Rapunzel braids who grudgingly point out the museum bathrooms, the kids who make it impossible to hear at the Union Station movies and the service staff at my apartment building. All are groups of people with whom I'm usually annoyed. Mayor Barry, of course, is the most annoying of all.

People like me are drawn to D.C. like lost, cowardly, heartless dummies to the Emerald City. We come for glory, we come to find out what we're made of, we come to experience the magic of what, to congenital hall-monitor geeks like us, is the ultimate personal challenge. Like all visitors to enchanted cities, we pilgrims are nonplussed to find that we need bother ourselves with the mundane tasks of daily life. Shouldn't the capital city of the greatest nation on earth function as if by magic? OK, then, shouldn't the little people take care of the details and free us big ones to run the country? Some of us do not take D.C. very seriously.

In Japan a few years ago, I was struck by how clean and well-ordered everything was, as if elves came out at night and sprinkled fairy dust. I spent so much time marveling at how spotlessly clean the restaurant bathroom was that my friends came looking for me. Shop clerks shadowed us, possibly to prevent theft, but also to prevent customer exertion—they rushed to hand me any item I perused, however briefly. A crossing guard all but carried me across the street, belting out "Hai! Hai!" with Mermanesque gusto and without a trace of self-consciousness. This, I thought, is a place where everyone does his part. Why can't D.C. be like that?

Well, it can't because D.C. is not Japan. Nor is it the enchanted city. It's a real city filled with real people and specific problems. It took the latest go-round with the mayor (his abrupt departure from the city for two weeks of personal healing and the accompanying rumor frenzy that he had returned to drugs) to finally make me see D.C. as something other than a conduit for my ambition.

It really shouldn't have taken me so long to develop some sensitivity for this place. The first time I came here was in late 1990. I was an Air Force captain newly "back in the world" from Turkey. Assigned to the Pen-

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tagon, I took long breaks loitering on the shopping concourse just to enjoy the black people. I'd spent the last eighteen months having wide-eyed old ladies rub my skin at bus stops and then check their fingers, or literally stopping traffic in places like Diyarbakir, Plovdiv and Sofia. My white boyfriend, who attracted no attention at all, took to snarling, "Yes, she's that color all over!" It was wonderful to blend in again. At first. Then I noticed that all the black people I saw were pushing brooms and ringing cash registers. Of course, there are many successful blacks here, but clearly we're outnumbered and largely imported. My newfound sensitivity dissipated and then took full form as I got discharged, worked on the Clinton campaign and started skipping *The Washington Post*'s Metro section. Having followed a power job back here after law school, I'm determined to pay attention this time and sort out my feelings for this troubled city and its equally troubled mayor.

For all its problems, and notwithstanding the toll the position has taken on him, it's understandable why Barry wants to remain mayor. As one *Post* reporter put it, Barry "seems to remain almost dangerously addicted to the relentless rhythms of being the mayor." I have no doubt that he was also greatly motivated to spit in the nation's eye by winning re-election after his grueling, if well-deserved, public humiliation. The more interesting question is why, or whether, the city still wants him. A bitter Richard Cohen thinks D.C. should kick the Barry habit once and for all: "I have had it with Barry ... with his talent for confusing himself with this city," Cohen writes in a recent column. "The best thing Marion Barry could [have done] for his city is stay in St. Louis...." For all his frustrated howls, though, even Cohen can't help seeing the mayor as metaphor: "He hurts the city, but he was chosen in the first place because this is a hurting city." Now who's merging identities? Monitoring the city's reaction to Barry's return makes it clear that many Washingtonians, especially the poor and the black, still want their symbolic mayor. Only 25 percent of black D.C. residents polled last week by the *Post*, for example, believed Barry should step down as mayor (compared to 58 percent of whites). Two out of three of the black Washingtonians surveyed approved of the job Barry is doing (compared to one in six whites). But why?

Though I'm sure to be burned in effigy, I can't help being reminded of the most defeatist joke I ever heard growing up in the black working class; I only heard it once, but it was so sad I've never forgotten it. A white man flicks a bug off a black man's jacket. The black man sneers, "Y'all just don't want us to have nothing, do you?" Barry may be a tumbledown, inefficient, embarrassing, psychically pockmarked twelve-stepper, but so are D.C.'s public schools and roads, its diminishing job opportunities, its racial chasm, its bleak future, its crime and unemployment rates. If it's acceptable to allow D.C., the nation's capital, to endure such fundamental hardship, then the rest of America can endure Marion Barry. So there. He's not much, but he's all we've got.

Although Barry certainly accelerated the city's decline with his disastrous second and third terms, he was not the only reason. Government is this city's business, and that business is shrinking before its eyes—16,000 jobs were lost in the region from March 1995 to March 1996. As government contracts, revenues decline and with them services. The middle class moves out in search of new jobs, decent schools, better police protection, greater stability. The haves and the have-nots eye each other ever more warily across a widening divide that only makes their instances of contact more desperate and dangerous. The cycle of rot continues. Although a better mayor would help, D.C. will still be reeling from crisis to crisis for the foreseeable future.

I am a part of the problem. I work in D.C. but do not live there. I refuse to. *Post* reporter Courtland Milloy would number me among the "interlopers who, drunk with self-righteousness, lose sight of the suffering of the poor and think that getting rid of Barry will make everything all right." Who needs you? Milloy asks. Well, you do.

Transient carpetbaggers like myself, with our short-term focus and Maryland or Virginia driver's licenses, play the "should I or shouldn't I" game with D.C. Should I live in the District, have a hip Zip Code and escape the Potomac equivalent of the bridge and tunnel crowd? Or should I live in a city that functions, that doesn't reward incompetence and criminality with public office? Ironically, the attention I've been paying to D.C. politics has backfired: it made me choose to reside in what I have heard the beautiful people refer to as "a heinous D.C. suburb." Heinous, perhaps; dull, definitely—but at least run by someone so quietly efficient I know neither his name nor where to call to lodge complaints about him. I certainly don't know whether he's had his colon irrigated.

I had many mundane reasons for this choice—more bang for the apartment buck, my mother's refusal to visit me in Murder City. The only emotional one was Marion Barry. I refuse to have him, and all he symbolizes, as my mayor. I'm immune to his stories of redemption and transformation: been there, heard that. I believe he means well, I have no doubt that he struggles manfully against his demons, but that's not enough.

Nor is it enough for all the other middle-class types, both black and white, who would much prefer to live in D.C. than not. Our presence would provide a stabilizing influence there, but, instead, we have been fleeing the city in ever greater numbers. Our taxes get collected no matter what, and, in return, we want results: a mayor who is sober, serious, efficient. Not one who merely tries to be. We want the bugs flicked off our jackets, you might say, by whoever is willing to do the job. Replacing Barry won't fix D.C., but it would be a giant leap in the right direction.

DEBRA DICKERSON is a lawyer and writer in the Washington D.C. area.

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YAHOOS

By Randall Stross

"The most unteachable of all Animals." Such was Jonathan Swift's description of the Yahoos whom Gulliver discovered in his travels to the land of the Houyhnhnms. What delicious fun Swift would have had depicting the investors who flocked to April's initial public offering (IPO) of Yahoo!, the tiny software company with the instantly famous market capitalization. Investors that first afternoon were so desperate to get one of Yahoo!'s precious shares that their clamor briefly pushed the company's value into the stratosphere: $1.1 billion.

Yahoo! is in the information business or rather the information-about-information business: it provides a free directory service for anyone wishing to track down information using a World Wide Web browser like Netscape Navigator but who doesn't know exactly where to look. You might compare it to the Yellow Pages, except that businesses don't pay Yahoo! for a listing—Yahoo! makes its money, or more accurately, plans to make its money, from advertisers who buy space on the screen where visitors type in search requests and view listings.

That's the theory, anyway. How this brand-new business will work in practice is still something of a mystery—which makes the rush to grab Yahoo! shares all the more baffling. Here is an enterprise, after all, where even basic statistics crucial to potential advertisers—such as the actual number of users who peruse the Web—remain elusive. Yahoo! itself emerged as a public service only two years ago and only began soliciting advertisements last year. The Yahoo! episode will surely take its place in that long history of investor follies in which the peculiarities of mass psychology turn supposedly rational humans into gullible simpletons. Like the notorious tulip craze of the seventeenth century, it's a vivid example of the ways in which novelty—in this case, that magical word "Internet"—can seduce.

Remember the tulip craze from Economics 101? In seventeenth-century Holland, the desire of the rich to show off their connoisseurship of rare tulip varieties grew into a competition to secure bulbs at almost any price. Traders, observing an apparently insatiable demand for the bulbs, purchased them in droves, and soon merchants and shopkeepers began to play the market, too, buying tulips with the expectation that they could be resold at a tidy profit shortly afterward. The speculative frenzy that gripped the nation between 1634 and 1637 produced outrageous prices—horses, carriages, entire estates were paid to obtain a single bulb.

What binds today's Yahoo! investors to the tulip-maniacs of the seventeenth century is the speculative nature of their purchases. In the Yahoo! case, the financial fundamentals would not have warranted a share price even a tenth of what the Internet frenzy produced, so investors were essentially buying a betting chit. They were counting on a continuing inflow of eager purchasers, willing to cast price-earnings ratios and other conventional measures of financial performance aside and buy Yahoo! shares at ever higher prices.

There is something undeniably appealing about Yahoo!'s postmodern ability to mock itself. The father of one of the company's founders used the term "yahoo" as an affectionate diminutive—as in "you yahoos"—when referring to his rambunctious son and friends. It has spawned many acronyms—the company endearingly suggests it could stand for "Yet Another Hierarchical Officious Oracle."

But, if we put aside the wordplay and look at the company with sober regard, it's clear that Yahoo! at the time of its IPO was no more than a corporate toddler. Only a year before, its headquarters were the dorm rooms of its founders, a pair of doctoral students in electrical engineering at Stanford. When it presented its prospectus to the public it could boast of only $1.3 million—in revenue, not profits—for the previous year. These numbers are indicative of a larger trend: investors interested in software companies are insisting upon less and less corporate maturity. In 1986, when Microsoft had its IPO, the company had revenues in the previous twelve months of $162 million (and earnings per share of $1.33). Netscape, the subject of last year's blowout IPO, had almost exactly one-tenth that revenue ($16.6 million) and scant earnings. Now we have Yahoo!, with revenue less than a tenth of Netscape's at a comparable point (and losses for its preceding year).

As is customary in the IPO game, the Yahoo! shares

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were nominally priced deliberately below what purchasers on the first day were expected to pay. In this way, the share price set by public trading would reflect a pleasant immediate bump, bringing instant profits to the large institutional investors who had purchased shares at the artificially low price set by the underwriters. The large investors then flipped their allocated shares—pocketing an instant 100 percent (or greater) profit. Once they unloaded, the speculative sweepstakes began: small-fry investors cried out for a shot at the shares at whatever price willing sellers could be found. When the first seller surfaced among the favored clients who had subscribed to the shares at $13 a share, the trade was made at $24.50; nice work if you can get it. From there, the price required to bring sellers into the market rose into the empyrean—over $43—then down to a still-vertiginous $33 at the end of its first day, ending with a market valuation of $848 million and bumping Netscape from the Nasdaq record book for the third-highest first-day price rise. It was certainly not Yahoo! itself, hip or no, that devised the new gloss on its name: Yet Another Humongously Overpriced Offering.

The investors who currently hold Yahoo! shares seem perfectly willing to be borne along by a one-word rationale: Internet. If they bother to expand their analysis, it runs something like this: "Internet! Will Soon Mean Big $. Yahoo! No $ yet. But highly visible. Lots of daily visitors. Advertisers will eventually pay big $ for chance to appear before all those visiting eyeballs. Ergo, Buy Yahoo!."

This proposition is not, on the face of it, absurd. In the case of Yahoo!, it's the pricing that's out of whack, not the notion that Internet users will probably continue to appreciate the actual services of a Yahoo!. It's one thing to make the case, based on suppositions about how advertisers will deploy their budgets on the Internet, that Yahoo! could eventually become a $50 million company. It is another for investors to convince themselves it could be a *billion*-dollar company.

What are the risks for the investor who has placed faith in Yahoo!? Well, to begin with, there are its many competitors. Already out there are Lycos and Excite; America Online's Web Crawler and Inktomi's Hotbot; Infoseek's Openguide and Open Text's Open Text Index. For services that provide reviews, one can turn to Magellan or Cyberdog or Pointcom or The Whole Internet Catalog. Some of Yahoo!'s competitors, like Digital Equipment, a company with $15 billion a year in revenues and a slick search service called Alta Vista, have considerably greater financial, technical and marketing resources than Yahoo!.

Then there's the company's dependence on other parties—the fact, for example, that it must pay $5 million to Netscape for the privilege of having Yahoo! as one of the companies listed on Netscape's "Net Search" Web page. The privilege is neither exclusive (four others share the same space) nor long-term (it runs for twelve months). No more certain is the willingness of advertisers to pay a Yahoo! in the absence of hard evidence that the advertising actually has its desired effects. Advertisers who have been dabbling on the Web are learning that the number of "impressions" presumably made when a search site's user spies a display ad on the page with his search results doesn't tell much. Proctor & Gamble recently struck a new deal with Yahoo! (post-IPO) that bases payment for advertisements not on "hits" to a given page but on "click-throughs" that require the visitor to show enough interest in an ad to click on it in pursuit of more information. As advertisers move out of the experimental stage and develop more stringent criteria for measuring the success of ads on the Web, the dreamy projections of Yahoo! and its venture capital backer, Sequoia Capital, may well turn out to fall far short of hopes.

Assembling such a risk list does not require assiduous research in obscure trade-industry rags: it's all laid out in Yahoo!'s own prospectus. Long gone are the days when a company preparing to go public could fulfill the SEC's requirements by inserting a brief section of boilerplate labeled "Risk Factors." In Yahoo!'s case, risk factors are enumerated in no fewer than twenty-seven separate headings and elaborately cross-referenced to boot. How, then, can we explain Yahoo! investors' willful blindness to the risks? Trying to explain irrational behavior is always perilous, but it may be that the SEC's insistence on thorough disclosure of risks serves to encourage precisely what it was intended to dampen: a kind of fling-caution-to-the-wind insouciance on the part of investors. Detailed analysis of risks is now regarded as the new boilerplate—"Oh, the SEC requires companies to say 'yadda, yadda, yadda' "—as easily ignored as the airplane safety instructions in the seat pocket.

But the amorphous nature of the Internet has certainly played a role in this and other dizzying IPOs in the cyber business. The Internet's lack of a center makes it hard to visualize or track—and hard to doubt the all-encompassing nature of its supposedly revolutionary impact. Perhaps we will look back on the way in which otherwise intelligent investors suspended their critical faculties when it came to Internet-related stocks as an instance of late-twentieth-century millenarianism, an eagerness to see in the new technology a fresh start for the Elect who Understand What It Means.

Instead of betting on a clean-slate future fantasy, these investors would do better to look to the past, to revisit Swift and the Yahoos, or to think again about those tulip-maniacs. When we permit ourselves to be carried along by a crowd that has tossed rationality aside and declared the unsustainable to be sustainable, we become real Yahoos. There's nothing especially uplifting or amusing about what must inevitably follow.

RANDALL STROSS is the author of a book about Microsoft to be published this fall by Addison-Wesley.

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GUERRILLAS IN THE MIST

By Andres Oppenheimer

More than two years after their uprising began, Mexico's Zapatista rebels and their charismatic leader, Subcommander Marcos, have lost momentum. Militarily, they remain surrounded by the Mexican army in a remote corner of the southern state of Chiapas. Politically, marathon peace talks with the government have disappeared from the front page and may soon break off altogether. Yet, for all their woes, the Zapatistas have one thing going for them: they continue to fascinate socially conscious activists and radical chic celebrities in Europe and the U.S.

In recent weeks, Oliver Stone and actor Edward James Olmos have made separate pilgrimages to Chiapas for widely publicized meetings with Subcommander Marcos. The Hollywood tourists had barely left when a new convoy headed by former French First Lady Danielle Mitterrand arrived for her own encounter with the ski-masked guerrilla leader. Former French guerrilla-turned-government-adviser Regis Debray was next to pose with Marcos—the latest in a long list of writers working on books or documentaries about the rebel hero. Sensing a publicity coup, Benetton, the Italian clothing firm, offered Marcos a juicy modeling contract (he turned it down).

The U.S. media are not immune to the hype. "What Robin Hood was to the people of Sherwood Forest, Subcommander Marcos has become to the people of Mexico—a fighter for the rights of peasants who are trapped in poverty by the large landowners," declared the voice-over for a "60 Minutes" profile of Marcos a few months after the January 1, 1994, rebellion. Reflecting an image of the rebel leader held by many (including me) at the time, normally hard-nosed correspondent Ed Bradley prompted: "What you are asking for is basic individual rights? ... What we call in the United States life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?" Marcos nodded, "Yes."

Well, Marcos wanted that—and much more. His force, described in most U.S. and European newspapers simply as an "Indian army," was actually born as the rural wing of the National Liberation Forces (NLF), a white-dominated Marxist guerrilla group founded in 1969 and based in Mexico City. The Zapatistas altered their rhetoric after the rebellion, when Marcos discovered the public relations value of casting his uprising as a struggle for Indian rights—but the organization was created by, and in large measure remains under the control of, not indigenous peasants, but white intellectuals. The main difference between the Zapatistas and previous Latin American guerrillas is that Marcos succeeded where "Che" Guevara and so many others had failed: the middle-class rebel leaders won the allegiance of scores of Indian communities.

According to its own documents, the NLF had by 1980 adopted a Maoist strategy of "prolonged popular war," which would combine urban and rural guerrilla actions throughout the country with massive protests by the civilian population to wear down the government and ultimately topple it. Taking charge of the plan's rural strategy, a group of young Marxist philosophy and sociology professors at the Autonomous Metropolitan University of Mexico (UAM)—including Rafael Sebastian Guillen, who the government would later identify as Subcommander Marcos—moved to Chiapas.

By the early '90s, they had built a sizable force made up of Mexico City intellectuals, Mayan peasant leaders and officials of local Archdiocese lay groups. The NLF's military wing in Chiapas was led by three subcommanders—Subcommander Marcos, in charge of the Osocingo area; Subcommander Daniel, who headed the Altamirano region; and Subcommander Pedro, who led troops in the Las Margaritas area—all light-skinned intellectuals from Mexico City. In 1993, shortly before the rebellion, NLF leaders issued a Declaration of Principles stating that their goal was "to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, understood as a government of the workers that will stave off counter-revolution and begin the construction of socialism in Mexico."

To be sure, Subcommander Marcos deserves praise for drawing world attention to the dismal conditions of the Chiapas Indians and the rampant government corruption in that state (and most of Mexico, for that matter). In addition to the now widely cited poverty statistics—in many of Chiapas's Indian villages, nearly 70 percent of the homes lack electricity and half the population lacks drinking water—free trade and the

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removal of a decades-old law that granted peasants lifelong property rights over their lands had wreaked havoc on Mayan communities, which were already suffering from a steep decline in world coffee prices. Neither the government nor its conservative opposition seemed particularly concerned.

Adding to these indignities was the mounting evidence of grotesque government waste. Arriving in San Cristobal de las Casas, the city where the Zapatista rebellion started, the first thing I noticed was a monumental edifice—by far the tallest building in town—with hundreds of helmeted construction workers laboring at full steam. A huge sign in front of the building proclaimed: "Theater of the City: For the well-being of the people of Chiapas."

It was an $11 million state-of-the-art theater and opera house, not far from where the fighting was taking place. With 1,000 seats and a sunken pit for a 100-member symphony orchestra, the theater was to serve a city and several surrounding Indian towns that together had fewer than 100,000 residents, most of whom couldn't even afford the pair of shoes required to enter it. As if to drive home the contrast between rich and poor in Chiapas, the new theater was going up right next to a crumbling government building where hundreds of homeless Indians from the nearby town of San Juan Chamulas had taken refuge.

The city was also remodeling its old colonial theater at a cost of more than $1 million. San Cristobal would soon have two state-of-the-art theaters. It would be able to present itself as a cultural center with more theater seats per capita than Paris or New York and, perhaps not coincidentally, as the only such center with a guerrilla uprising in its midst.

Judging from an interview, I suspect that Subcommander Marcos is sincerely appalled at the government's indifference to the Mayans' plight. But, before the 1994 uprising, Indian rights had never been central to his organization's rhetoric. Like other Marxist groups, the NLF interpreted its country's problems in class rather than racial or cultural terms. Even after the uprising, the Zapatistas' first official communiqués made only marginal references to Indian rights. *The Mexican Awakener*, the group's first known official publication, virtually ignored the particular concerns of Indians as an ethnic group. The Zapatista revolution, it said, was a struggle by "the poor, the exploited and the miserable of Mexico" against "the oppressive government and the big national and foreign exploiters of the people."

Only after the first week of fighting, when the Zapatista rebels had made headlines worldwide, would Subcommander Marcos begin to de-emphasize class struggle and focus on the Indian aspects of the rebellion. Mexico's intelligence services would soon draw their own conclusion. Somebody—perhaps Zapatista friends in the Roman Catholic Church, rebel sympathizers in the United States or Europe—had seen the international reaction to the uprising and had given Marcos a precious piece of advice: forget the socialist mumbo jumbo, and play the Indian card. That was what was drawing attention in New York, Paris, Madrid and Mexico City and what helped turn the Chiapas rebels into media stars.

When I interviewed him in the Chiapas jungle, Marcos freely admitted that he had adjusted his political message after the rebellion. "The change resulted from a decision by the (Zapatista) Committee to respond to government charges that we were foreigners and 'professionals of violence,' " he said, citing the term used by the Salinas government to describe the rebels in the first days of fighting. "The Committee said, 'We must emphasize our Mexican and Indian roots and show that this is not a movement financed by foreign governments, Castro, or anything of the sort. We have to show people that this is a Mexican and Indian movement.' "

When I mentioned to a Mexican source with close ties to the Zapatista leadership that the NLF's 1993 Declaration of Principles calling for a "dictatorship of the proletariat" was hardly that of a group committed to representative democracy, he played down the document's significance, without denying its authenticity. It was a morale-boosting internal statement aimed at the Zapatistas' Mayan troops and written in a Marxist rhetoric that Indian political activists had become used to hearing for the past three decades, he said. You could not change that language overnight, throwing your troops into ideological confusion at a time when you were preparing to launch your all-out offensive.

Maybe so. Indeed, Subcommander Marcos may have convinced himself by the time of the uprising that communism's days were over. But his political history should at least raise questions about the sincerity of his moderate, post-insurrection rhetoric. While the Zapatista uprising cannot be explained away as the work of a small group of Mexico City radicals, it wasn't exactly a spontaneous Indian rebellion, either. It was a long-planned offensive by a white-dominated Marxist guerrilla group that found considerable support among Mayan communities in a place wrecked by government corruption.

For all his personal charm, Subcommander Marcos has yet to unequivocally state that he no longer believes in class struggle and that he has come to terms with what the National Liberation Forces used to call "bourgeois democracy." Until that happens, he runs the risk of being seen by many Mexicans, even those legitimately outraged by the country's glaring disparities of wealth, as a charismatic but marginal figure—a fashionable curiosity for Hollywood celebrities in search of excitement.

ANDRES OPPENHEIMER is the author of *Bordering on Chaos: Guerrillas, Stockbrokers, Politicians, and Mexico's Road to Prosperity* (Little, Brown), from which this article is adapted.

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Fair Trading

Every film, good or otherwise, carries with it its integral contract. "Believe me," it says to us, "for these intrinsic reasons." If the film is realistic, it relies for credibility on its closeness to our experience. But many films rely, for believability, on other matters. Here are two contrasting examples.

The Horseman on the Roof (Miramax Zoë), a French film, was directed by Jean-Paul Rappeneau, who made the latest *Cyrano* with Gérard Depardieu. Rappeneau and two collaborators adapted this new screenplay from a once-celebrated novel of the same name by the Provençal author Jean Giono. The story has two main currents. In Provence, in the 1830s, Italian political exiles are being pursued by Austrian agents who want to prevent the Italian patriots from returning to Italy and troubling the Austrian rulers there. (Italian struggle against Austrian rule was the background of Visconti's glorious *Senso*.) Also, at this time in Provence, an epidemic of cholera rages, killing thousands. Moving through this doubly dangerous world are two central figures: Angelo Pardi, a young Italian revolutionary, and Pauline de Théus, a young French aristocrat.

Angelo, fleeing Austrians and treacherous Italians who have already murdered a friend of his, takes refuge in a mansion where he meets Pauline, who is alone. The two, for different reasons, must move on. He insists on escorting her; she accepts his chivalry. The breathtaking adventures that they go through, the narrow escapes, his virtuosity as swordsman and horseman, her resources and persistence, are all amazing. (Angelo is a colonel in an Italian regiment of hussars and at one point escapes over roofs: hence the film's title.) Never is there any physical intimacy between the two, except for a sequence in which he must massage her when cholera attacks her. Never is there any word of love between them. But the air is charged with the fact that they do *not* make love—as they journey through one peril after another.

It's quite easy to believe that Angelo's code of honor would oblige him to risk his life for his country and also to respect the lady he accompanies. It's equally easy to believe in Pauline's decorum. Where this film's special contract of belief comes into play is in the physical exploits—the leaping around on horseback, the battles against odds, the almost continuous swashbuckling that would exhaust any present-day decathlon champ. Why do we accept it all? What does the film offer us in exchange for our belief? Beauty.

That's the bargain. The film buys our belief with beauty. First, the two principals are beautiful. Angelo is played by Olivier Martinez, a relative newcomer who has in abundance the Byronic looks and manner that the role needs. Pauline is Juliette Binoche, exquisite but no insipid doll, full of fire and fears and pride. Beyond the attraction of these two—and not, incidentally, flawless performances by the whole cast, including a bit by Depardieu—is the visual beauty of the film. Rappeneau shot most of it outdoors in southern France, and Thierry Arbogast's color camera enraptures us with mountain vistas and great meadows and charming villages and high-perched castles. In a delicate but firm way, the double beauty—of the principals and of the landscape—seduces us into accepting the physical action. "Why quibble about probabilities?" says this film. "Let's make a deal: you believe, and we'll ravish you."

Done.

Then there's **Mission: Impossible** (Paramount), which has its own contract. The screenplay, suggested by the TV series of course, was written by David Koepp and Robert Towne from a story by Koepp and Steven Zaillian, all of whom almost inscribe this film's contract on the screen. They will invent whatever they choose in this story of the CIA versus foreign agents, will plot and counterplot, and we will be able to believe it all—why? Certainly not because of beauty, as with Rappeneau. Here the quid pro quo is high-tech equipment. Nothing (the film implies) so involved with sophisticated electronic gadgetry need be, or can be, questioned.

For instance, at one point, three men and a woman invade CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, to steal a top-secret list that is very formidably guarded. To succeed in this venture, even to begin it, the raiders need a great deal of special equipment. How they found it, how (in their circumstances) they paid for it, how they got their knowledge of

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Cold Comfort Farm. *Kate Beckinsale, Eileen Atkins, Ian McKellen and other good actors bring wit and crotchet to this adaptation of Stella Gibbons's comic novel of 1932. An airy London miss amid some woolly rustics. (Reviewed 5/27/96)* **Flirting with Disaster.** *Buoyant all the way. And sexy. And funny. David O. Russell's comedy about a young man's search for his biological parents. (4/22/96)* **Last Dance.** *Bruce Beresford directs Sharon Stone as a low-lifer on death row. Echoes of "Dead Man Walking," but both Beresford and Stone are better than their counterparts in the earlier picture.(5/20/96)* **Twister.** *Breathtaking tornado stuff. Everything else—story, etc.—is negligible; the storms are awesome. (6/10/96)*—**SK**

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air-conditioning vents and so on, the film doesn't bother to explain. It's a high-tech action. It's "now." Characters who know this equipment, who know how to use it, must ipso facto be credible.

This "now" contract is hardly novel but is nonetheless the most interesting aspect of the film. What goes on in the picture is not, in the light of reason or even of possibility, a whit more convincing than all the Dumas-like flourishes in Rappeneau. If it could do so, *Mission: Impossible* would scoff at *The Horseman.* Yet the modern film is a direct descendant of the earlier story. The deal is analogous: only the details are different.

In fulfilling its bargain, the modern film also underscores what has become a given. Computers now have the same relation to thrillers that six-guns have to Westerns. In both genres, the equipment has become indispensable. A thriller today, whether at local police level or global, cannot function without computers—as communication, as information source and, in their own way, as flourish. Fluency with a computer is as essential to a thriller as Colt-play is to sheriffs.

The story begins in Prague, where a CIA team wants to intercept a foreign agent who has stolen an American secret list. He will try to sell it at a U.S. Embassy ball. Of course the intercept runs into troubles: this is only the second reel of a long feature. The story then moves elsewhere, and we enter Suspense-land, where so many thrillers dwell. It's not always clear who is doing what or why: we just know it's all full of suspense and that anything we see may be misleading.

The screenwriters and the director, Brian de Palma, are clearly conversant with James Bond pictures and with such thrillers as *Topkapi.* De Palma, if not original, is a bright student. But the film is painful in at least one way—its waste of good actors.

Emmanuelle Béart last appeared in the quiet, lyric, *Nelly and Monsieur Arnaud.* Here she has no role. She's on the screen a good deal, but she has no kind of character, nothing that fifty other attractive young women couldn't have done equally well. Tom Cruise, one of our most lucent stars, doesn't get to twinkle much here. He's in almost every sequence, but he's not doing much that Steven Seagal or Jean-Claude Van Damme couldn't have done. Jon Voight, absent much too long, is more impressive in a smaller part. And Vanessa Redgrave has an amusing surprise for her devotees, like me.

But the actors aren't part of the basic contract: high-tech is. Insofar as *Mission: Impossible* persuades, which it doesn't completely, it's because of the gadgetry. •

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Robert Brustein on Theater

Revisited Plays, Revised Opinions

One of the more humbling experiences a theater critic can suffer is to visit revivals of plays he saw when they were originally performed. Nothing exposes more abruptly the ephemeral, arbitrary nature of opinion-making. Having been a reviewer now for almost four decades, I often find myself revising earlier judgments, chastening the arrogance of my youth with the attitudes (no doubt equally arrogant) of my later years. Still, I can't blame these changes of mind entirely on fickleness or mutability. Obviously, the theatrical occasion is not just a textual reading, it is a staged event. Often a new production can reveal the virtues of a play that was once too easily dismissed, just as time can unearth the faults of a play that was originally overpraised.

Let me support my case with three examples, the first being **The Night of the Iguana** (Roundabout). When I first saw this play in 1962, I called it another of Tennessee Williams's latter-day exercises in marking time. But my review was mixed. While the writing seemed to me somewhat aimless and self-derivative, I also had to admire its dark humor, febrile warmth and atmospheric richness. Above all, I found *The Night of the Iguana* to be an occasion for ripe characterizations, especially of the crapulous, vaguely demented central character, a spoiled priest named T. Lawrence Shannon. Shannon bears some resemblance to the self-hating alcoholic consul in Malcolm Lowry's *Under The Volcano*. And Patrick O'Neal in the original stage production (as well as Richard Burton in the film version) managed to etch a nagging portrait of self-laceration and self-loathing, while Bette Davis, Margaret Leighton and Alan Webb powerfully performed the other overwrought characters exiled in a Mexican resort hotel.

Like one of these—Nonno, "the oldest living and practicing poet in the world"—Williams was showing a lot of fatigue in this play, flapping about like an aged eagle too tired to spread his wings. As a result, the work lacks an organizing principle, though it covers familiar terrain. The defeated heretic Shannon, raging against a "senile delinquent" God, is yet another self-portrait of a sexual miscreant (he sleeps with underage girls) punished for his transgressions. And Williams's compulsion to repeat his litany on the subjects of fleshly corruption and the way life maims the sensitive is so strong that he no longer bothers to provide a substructure of action to support his themes.

Oddly, the play now seems even more an act of desperation, if not of automatic writing, than when it first appeared, largely because of Robert Falls's ineffective production. Loy Arcenas's rendering of the ramshackle Casa Verde hotel near Acapulco drips with lush fecundity, the steaming tropical underbrush closing in on its battered tin roofs. And Cherry Jones gives a sensitive and penetrating, if sometimes over-emphatic, performance as the spinster Hannah Jelkes.

But other perfectly competent actors seem to have been seriously miscast or misdirected. Marsha Mason is an attractive, appealing personality, but she only looks persuasive when swatting away mosquitoes. Mason is utterly lost as Maxine Faulk, too bland and suburban, too lacking in animal power, to find the juice of this lusty Patrona—and the German tourists who entrap and torture the symbolic iguana are World War II movie cartoons. As for the usually dependable William Petersen as Shannon, he acts less desperate than jumpy. Instead of having a crackup, he appears to be suffering a case of coffee nerves. As a result of the uneven acting, it becomes obvious that these characters share no common necessity. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the clash between Blanche and Stanley was predestined. Shannon, Hannah, Maxine and Nonno all seem to inhabit different plays.

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum was produced in the same year as *Iguana*, starring Zero Mostel as Pseudolus. I blessed it then for reminding us of the musical theater's roots in farce action and burlesque characters, at a time when the musical stage was being dominated by the sanctimonious overchoreographed "book" shows of Rodgers and Hammerstein. For the same reasons, I bless it now. Burt Shevelove and Larry Gelbart's script is a bracing modern compendium of Plautine farces—notably *Casina, Curculio, Miles Gloriosus* and *Pseudolus*—one of the few Broadway adaptations that doesn't betray its source material. Although the momentum of the farce action is often interrupted by Stephen Sondheim's (admittedly witty) songs, *Forum* represents the resurgence of a fading but still vigorous slapstick tradition, with sexual pursuit as its animating impulse.

Jerry Zaks's new production at the St. James Theatre is a well-rehearsed, efficiently paced, colorfully enacted evening of theater. It features Broadway favorite Nathan Lane, who has only to step in front of the curtain to get the patrons clapping. Both the director and the star are complete professionals. There isn't a shred of stage business that hasn't been carefully worked out. And no expense has been spared. Indeed, about half the production budget is eaten by the opening number, "Comedy Tonight," when the curtain "mistakenly" rises on a fully realized set for *Medea* (never used again) showing figures in tragic masks writhing in agony. Considering all the money and expertise that went into this enterprise, why did I feel so let down?

For one thing, I sorely missed old Zero, and I also missed his ribald cohorts (Jack Gilford, Ruth Kobart, David Burns, Ronald Holgate) from the 1962 production. Nobody owns a lease on a musical role, but the original cast members of *Forum* earned their stripes in vaudeville and burlesque. The revival company seems to have done its training in television sitcoms. No one can reproduce the way Mostel managed to defy gravity with his gross dignity and elephantine grace. But his sense of danger and surprise was generic of all great comics. You never knew what he was going to do on stage, and neither did he. Nathan Lane has the calibrated timing of an actor performing between commercial breaks. He never fails to trigger the laugh meter, especially when, being sent off for mare's sweat for a potion, he whinnies and stamps his foot, or when he tells an eunuch, "Don't you ever lower your voice to me." But why do all his shticks and takes, his passionate love affair with the audience, seem so mannered and predictable?

I have always admired Mark Linn-Baker, my old student and colleague, but except for a few delicious moments in drag he is too laid back to galvanize the manic Hysterium. Perhaps this good actor spent too many years playing the straight man on "Perfect Strangers." Lewis J. Stadlen brings a welcome touch of Groucho to the role of Senex, the lecherous old father. And Ernie Sabella plays Lycus, the brothel-keeper, with refreshing vulgarity. But even the showgirls—courtesans with names like Gymnasia, Tintinabula and Panacea—who should be animated objects of lust, look more like posed mannequins in a swimsuit

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issue of *Sports Illustrated*. In 1962, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* was a wild farce with songs. Now it seems like just another Tony Award-winning Broadway musical.

Edward Albee's **A Delicate Balance** was first performed in 1966 when the Vietnam War was heating up. In Alan Schneider's reverent production it struck me as an entirely superfluous drawing-room drama in solemn imitation of Eliot's *The Cocktail Party*. To use a favorite word of the time, it was irrelevant, so precious that its one contemporary reference (to the Chinese bomb) had a jarring effect. After the redskin ferocities of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, the play struck many of us as a paleface mandarin exercise in metaphysics, dispensed in bloated language between generous helpings of strong waters. I opined at the time, rather cruelly, that *A Delicate Balance* was the work of an interior decorator, of someone who was letting his servants do his living for him.

Gerald Gutierrez's recent Lincoln Center production (at the Plymouth) doesn't entirely revise my opinion of the play, which still sounds a bit precious and mannerist. But it vastly increases my respect for it. Gutierrez's casting genius reveals that *A Delicate Balance* is not a metaphysical drama at all. It is essentially a comedy of manners. Rarely in American theater do we find such uniformly meticulous performances—and any writing that inspires such brilliant acting must be respected as well. The design team of John Lee Beatty (sets), Jane Greenwood (costumes) and Pat Collins (lighting) has created a haunting world, composed of a diagonal interior with mahogany book cases, an imposing chandelier, countless bottles of booze, heavily upholstered furniture and a well-appointed staircase (the setting could work as well for a production of *The Little Foxes*). And director Gutierrez has layered detail upon detail, orchestrating climaxes of genuine power while heightening the brittle wit of the dialogue. His production is at the same time crisp and charged, yet fluid, fresh and spontaneous.

A Delicate Balance is about a resentful nuclear family, living together in strained if opulent circumstances. They pass the time decanting whiskey, vodka and cognac laced with bitchy remarks until a neighboring couple invades the household seeking refuge from some nameless dread. Their presence creates a crisis, ambiguously resolved after the family comes to terms with the presence of the intruders. The couple eventually decides to vacate the premises anyway, leaving the family to pick up the shreds of their lives.

The six-member cast performs this like a piece of Mozart chamber music. George Grizzard, decked out in a conservative uniform of blue blazer, grey slacks and open pink shirt, plays the retired Republican stockbroker Tobias with a slight arthritic limp and a subtle hint of upper-middle-class angst. He manages to show both the blocked emotions of this character and the disappointments lying beneath the surface. Agnes, his wife, is a brittle dowager, whose every line of dialogue appears to have been pre-thought and prefashioned for inclusion in *Bartlett's Quotations*. It is the triumph of Rosemary Harris to make this familiar Albee character seem real and moving. Mary Beth Hurt, somewhat miscast as their daughter Julia, is the most neurotic and territorial of the three with her constant demands to repossess her invaded bedroom—but also the most instinctive and alive. And Elizabeth Wilson and John Carter, as the two intruders, subtly suggest the supressed terror ("We were frightened and there was nothing") that underlies even the most comfortable lives.

It is Elaine Stritch as Claire, the bibulous sister-in-law, who has the lion's share of Albee's acerbic wit. With her ash-blond hair and great legs, her slightly hunched Texas lope, and the way she clenches her jaw after lobbing a witticism in an effortless whiskey baritone, Stritch creates a portrait of one of the most engaging boozers in modern drama. (Hitherto, Philip Barry had this field pretty much to himself). On the page, her lines don't seem half as funny or as barbed as when I heard them on the stage. Albee's dialogue still reads as somewhat literary and strained. But the production as a whole has virtually obliterated my 30-year-old distaste for the play. This splendid revival is one of those experiences that reminds a critic of the fallibility of opinion and the changing nature of art. •

What Jonathan Kozol, the conservative pundits, and the education experts don't get.

What We Talk About When We Talk About Education

By Sara Mosle

I.

Among a small group of public school teachers whom I know in New York, a single book has emerged as their reformers' bible, a kind of 1990s equivalent for educators of *Reveille for Radicals*, Saul Alinsky's 1946 handbook for social activists. The book is not *36 Children*, Herbert Kohl's memoir about his first year teaching, which appeared in 1964, and which is still the best of its kind. Nor is it any of Jonathan Kozol's more famous efforts, *Death at an Early Age*, *Savage Inequalities*, or his most recent book, *Amazing Grace*. It is not something angrily diagnostic, such as *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools*, a new study by David Berliner and Bruce Biddle, or *Dumbing Down Our Kids: Why American Children Feel Good About Themselves But Can't Read, Write, or Add*, by Charles Sykes. Nor is it something sentimental, such as Tracy Kidder's *Among Schoolchildren*, the story of an elementary school teacher.

The book, in fact, isn't about education at all. It is *Which Side Are You On?* by Thomas Geoghegan, a labor lawyer in Chicago, and its subject is the decline of organized labor. Why would a group of reform-minded teachers, many of whom regard the teachers' union in New York with ambivalence or downright hostility, look so far afield for inspiration? As one educator has put it:

> There is no need to add to the criticism of our public schools. The critique is extensive and can hardly be improved on. The processes of learning and teaching, too, have been exhaustively studied. One thinks of the books of . . . Jonathan Kozol, Herbert Kohl. . . . The question now is what to do.

What's remarkable about those words is that they were written more than a quarter of a century ago. They appeared

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in George Dennison's *The Lives of Children*, a portrait of the First Street School, a tiny, private, short-lived school for impoverished students in New York, where Dennison briefly taught in the early 1960s. Dennison died in 1987. Kozol and Kohl are still with us. Now they have new books, of varying merit; but neither writer has dramatically improved on his criticism of the public school system in the intervening years. Their first books remain their best, and as Dennison noted, they were already exhaustive in 1969.

Perhaps no genre has suffered more from its own clichés than education writing. In the last thirty years the messages, and the messengers, haven't changed very much. Year-in-the-life stories about teachers who succeed despite it all—someone like LouAnne Johnson, the English teacher in the film *Dangerous Minds*, or Jaime Escalante, the extraordinary math teacher portrayed in *Stand and Deliver*—have long been dear to screenwriters and to the editors of Sunday feature magazines. Such stories lend themselves to contradictory misconceptions as to why schools are bad. On the one hand, they minimize the adverse conditions that many teachers face, and proclaim that a truly dedicated teacher can succeed despite the obstacles. (Look at Jaime Escalante.) On the other hand, they exaggerate those same conditions by making them seem insurmountable, and proclaim that only a hero can succeed. (Look at Jaime Escalante.) Liberals argue for better conditions; the teachers are fine. Conservatives argue for better teachers; the conditions are fine. As the stalemate continues, the problems linger on.

That the schools in such stories are urban and public is almost always a given, and this emphasis has served to distort the debate about education as a whole. Americans' trust in the public school system has deteriorated since the 1960s, along with their trust in just about everything else. Most Americans have a poor opinion of the country's educational system. And yet the vast majority of parents give their own kids' schools a high grade, and this percentage has increased, rather than decreased, over the last several years. Despite much rhetoric to the contrary, especially from conservatives, Americans are not abandoning the public school system in droves, nor are they even particularly dissatisfied with their own children's schools.

If this doesn't seem the case to many education pundits, that may be because they are usually among that tiny elite—the 1 percent of Americans—who attended non-sectarian private schools or send their children to them or both. In no place is this more true than in the capital of punditry, Washington, D.C., where the public schools are particularly bad and where nearly all parents of economic means who live in the District opt out of the school system. Outside the capital, however, middle-class parents still typically enroll their kids in public schools, usually in suburban neighborhoods that they've moved to precisely because the schools there are regarded as good.

Despite recent calls for returning schools to local control, the fact remains that no institution in American life—certainly no government institution of similar scope—is more decentralized than America's school system. There are some 15,000 school districts in the United States, and they employ some 2.3 million schoolteachers—more than all the accountants, lawyers, judges and physicians in the country combined. These districts are run and financed almost entirely at the local level, usually through local property taxes. If the system isn't working, as many politicians like to claim, it probably argues against—rather than for—more local control. Yet pundits almost always refer to "the system" as if it were a single, monolithic, bureaucratic entity.

When we talk about the problems of public education in this country, what we are really talking about are the problems in poorer, urban schools—which is to say, we are usually talking not only about education, but about race and poverty as well. As one *New York Times* reporter recently put it to me, writing about public education has essentially become "the poverty beat."

Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation
by Jonathan Kozol
(Crown, 256 pp., $23)

Dumbing Down Our Kids: Why American Children Feel Good About Themselves But Can't Read, Write or Add
by Charles J. Sykes
(St. Martin's, 341 pp., $23.95)

The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools
by David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle
(Addison-Wesley, 414 pp., $25)

The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School in Harlem
by Deborah Meier
(Beacon Press, 190 pp., $20)

Possible Lives: The Promise of Public Education in America
by Mike Rose
(Houghton-Mifflin, 454 pp., $24.95)

Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform
by David Tyack and Larry Cuban
(Harvard University Press, 184 pp., $22.50)

The Tennessee Study of Class Size in the Early School Grades
by Frederick Mosteller
(American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 37 pp.)

II.

No education writer is better known, or has written more extensively about the poor, than Jonathan Kozol. His two most famous books, *Death at an Early Age* and *Savage Inequalities*, which appeared a quarter century apart, are testimony to how little the discussion has changed over the years. The books are shockingly, even purposely, similar. Both describe the horrific physical condition of the country's public schools; both lament widespread segregation in urban classrooms; both decry the stark economic inequities between richer and poorer districts; both question the underlying ideals of a nation that would let such inequities persist; and both use the most charged and inflammatory rhetoric to rouse a nation's slumbering conscience.

And yet finally the books are not the same. The earlier one is based on Kozol's own experience as a teacher. The later one is based on newspaper clippings. The first angers and inspires. The second deflates and defeats. The one is wrathfully idealistic. The other borders on cynicism. In sum: *Death at an Early Age* succeeds, *Savage Inequalities* fails. And within this difference lies the deterioration of the debate about education—and the deterioration of idealism—over the last thirty years. The teachers I know admired Geoghegan's book for one simple reason: it inspired them. This may sound corny, but when you are teaching every day in poorer urban schools, which are often overcrowded, under-supplied and in appalling disrepair, idealism is important. Idealism is your oxygen.

Kozol's outlook has always been apocalyptic, but one can't assume the apocalyptic pose forever. The end can't always be nigh. At some point the sky, or one's credibility, has to fall. *Death at an Early Age* is still a very good book, but when it was published in 1964 the prevailing mood of the country was complacency. By exposing the conditions at the ghetto school where he taught, Kozol was able to provoke outrage. (And because he worked in the trenches, he could afford to be a little sanctimonious.) But the prevailing mood of the country, at least in regard to ghetto schools, is hopelessness. In the current political climate, all Kozol does is contrib-

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ute to the sense of despair.

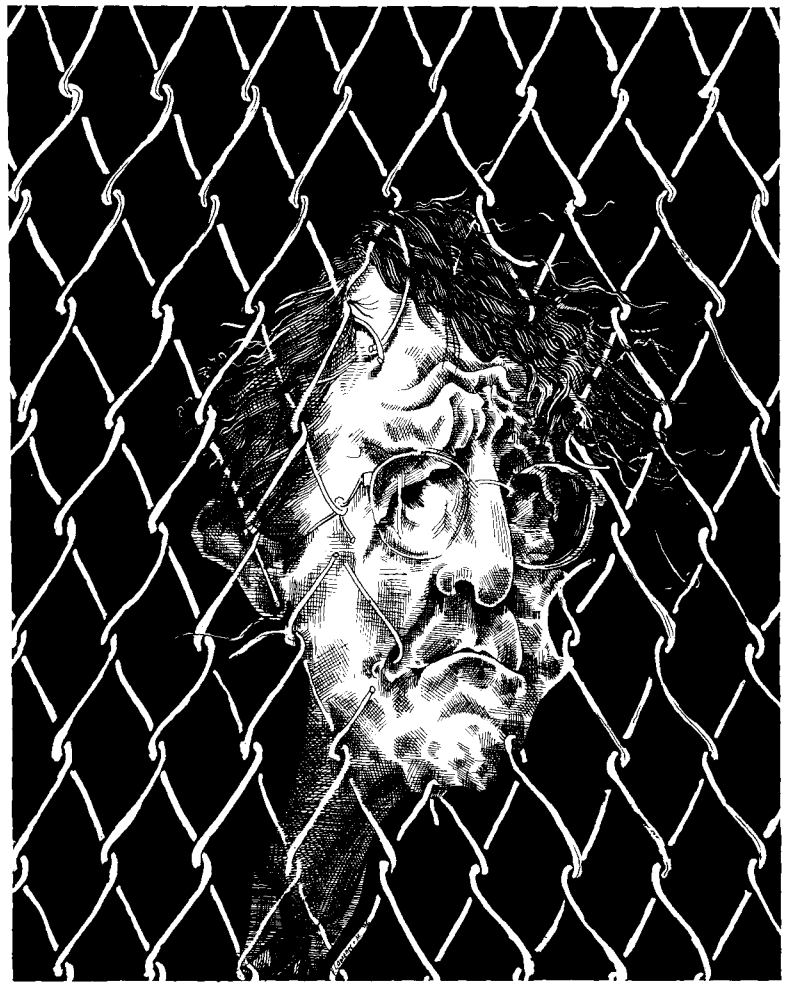
Kozol's style has been widely imitated. David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle begin *The Manufactured Crisis* with Kozol-like nostril-flaring: "This book was written in outrage." Outrage is perhaps not the best tone to strike when trying to reassure an anxious public, as Berliner and Biddle do, that a crisis does not exist in most of the nation's schools. (They believe that the biggest problems are confined to districts in impoverished and beleaguered neighborhoods.) Speaking softly, with steely reason or wry understatement, might work better.

Conservatives are no less hysterical. Charles J. Sykes has palpitations over the latest educational fads, such as "whole language," multiculturalism and "outcome-based" curricula. Not all of these concerns are misplaced, but Sykes discredits his own arguments by trying to outshout his opponents. As any teacher can testify, yelling seldom calms a classroom; it usually contributes, instead, to the sense of chaos. Sykes discounts most parents' favorable opinion of their own kids' schools by essentially arguing that they are too stupid to notice how dumb their children have become. This is an odd position for a conservative: most right-wingers insist that educational experts are *too* involved in local schools. Yet Sykes, the education expert, informs us that most parents are wrong. (Look who's being elitist now!)

Whether the crisis is real or "manufactured," there is something odd about a spate of books whose authors agree that most Americans don't even perceive that there is a crisis—at least not in their own children's schools. And with each side trying to trump its opponents with outrage of a higher suit, the ability to shock is diminished. Can the public really be blamed if it's dazed and confused?

The golden age of education writing was the 1960s, and the decade still looms large in much of the genre. Kozol claims that schools are bad because the promises of that decade weren't kept. "Many of us who came of age during the 1960s," he writes, "thought that these most blatant forms of residential segregation, and the gross extremes of wealth and poverty ... would be utterly transformed within another generation.... Our confidence, we now know, was mistaken." Kozol concludes that his generation failed, ergo all generations will fail. Hence his cynicism. Conservatives are similarly gloomy, but they point to the successes of the '60s as grounds for their pessimism. Perhaps everybody wouldn't be so depressed if they quit living in a past so distant.

Is it any wonder that teachers would be beguiled by Geoghegan's approach?



JONATHAN KOZOL BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

This is how his book begins: " 'Organized labor.' Say those words and your heart sinks. I am a labor lawyer and my heart sinks. Dumb, stupid, organized labor: this is my cause." Far from downplaying labor's problems, Geoghegan begins by conceding everything. Labor is "too arthritic to be a cause." It "gives off an almost animal sense of weakness: concessions, de-certs, shutdowns. It's like the Italian army in 1918: cars breaking down, baggage getting lost, officers getting fired on by their own troops." From such a nadir, however, Geoghegan slowly rebuilds the idea of what labor once was and now should be.

He speaks not in warmed-over 1960s rhetoric, but in fresh, pertinent, practical, even humorous terms. Far from touting his '60s credentials, as Kozol does, Geoghegan writes that "although I went to college in the late sixties, I was a 'student moderate.' " He remarks, "Actually, back then almost everyone was a moderate. The truth is that in the sixties you never had to do anything. You could be 'political' just by sitting in your dorm room, and that would be your witness to History." As Geoghegan tells it, "The story is how I became an activist in the seventies, just when the temptation for doing anything at all had stopped."

Idealism in America desperately needs a new language. Those who preach in the old style, such as Kozol, preach only to the converted, and so they convert no one. The people who read Kozol's books tend to subscribe already to his point of view; his books flatter, rather than challenge, their beliefs. In his dispiriting attempts to shock, he ends up papering over the complexities of the problems facing many teachers in their classrooms. It is no longer enough to venture, as he sometimes does, into blighted neighborhoods. Kozol offers no new tools or insights for confronting the poverty and hopelessness that he describes. And he is a lazy reporter.

Savage Inequalities is a shameless clip job. Kozol relies heavily on the work of local reporters to describe the schools in his book. Thus, he begins a long section on Chicago's schools by referring to a ten-part series in *The Chicago Tribune* by Bonita Brodt, "who spent several months at Goudy during 1988." Kozol then stitches together Brodt's own reporting to recreate scenes and dialogue at the school, often using Brodt's exact words, without ever putting them in quotes:

> Keisha has been fighting with her classmate. Over what? As it turns out, over a crayon. The child is terrified and starts to cry. Tears spill out of her eyes and drop onto the pages of her math book.

Here is the same scene, as reported ear-

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lier by Brodt:

> Now, Boxton [a counselor at the school] ... was trying to make sense of a situation where LaKeisha [also known as Keisha] beat up classmate Danny Beals ... in an argument over a crayon.... LaKeisha whispered, turning her head ever so slowly and, when she finally looked directly at Boxton, the tears spilled out of her eyes.... LaKeisha's tears drip onto a page in her math book.

Kozol goes on in this manner for several pages. When I first read his book, I assumed that he was the one who had witnessed the scene. It wasn't until I looked up the series by Brodt (for a review of the book in 1992) that I realized that Kozol had not even been to the school. The endnote, and there's no encouragement to turn there in the text, cryptically cites Brodt, but leaves unclear the enormous extent of Kozol's indebtedness. And the pattern repeats itself: in each city Kozol consults the local press and then has the audacity to criticize the reporters on whom he has relied for their "grayish" prose, which denies (of course) the possibility of outrage.

In his new book, *Amazing Grace*, about residents of the South Bronx, Kozol similarly spends little time in the neighborhood about which he writes. He parachutes in once every two or three months, and then only for a day or an afternoon. His idea of reporting is talking to taxi drivers to and from the airport (a method he actually employs more than once in his book). His approach might not be so maddening if he weren't continuously holding up his own reactions to what he sees as evidence of his moral superiority. After one conversation with a young mother dying of AIDS, he writes: "Listening to her voice ... I soon forget to take notes and almost forget that I am here in search of information." He wants us to know that he is not just a journalist. He goes on:

> There will be other times like these where I have to fight off the feeling that I am about to cry. I do fight it off because I do not want to be embarrassed. Outside the apartment, when I leave, I sometimes give in to these feelings, which I never can explain because they do not seem connected to the things that we talk about. It's something cumulative that just builds up during a quiet time.

The emotion looks contrived, because it goes only one way. Even the most saintly teachers occasionally want to strangle their students, but Kozol never gives in to such feelings. He is never exasperated, angered, delighted, bored or disgusted by the people whom he meets, because, no doubt, he never spends enough time with them to view them as anything other than "the poor." His message is, Watch what I feel, not what I do.

Yes, Kozol acknowledges the true awfulness of many ghetto schools and rightly says that no children in the United States should be subjected to such conditions. He is a religious kind of writer, calling on his readers to repent. But his religion is too easy; all it requires is a change of heart. Consider how Geoghegan covers similar terrain. With Orwell-like plainness, he describes his first morning at a soup kitchen run by nuns on Chicago's West Side: "The smell in the room was overpowering. The T-shirts seemed pasted on the men with fourteen days of sweat. I would stink of cabbage and ammonia and sweat for days after I left. Waiting for the nuns to open the door, I had almost gagged, and I wondered how the men could even bear to eat." Far from extolling his own virtue, Geoghegan confesses: "I had expected, at the end of it all, to love the poor, to be filled with a warm glow. But I didn't feel any love for the men here ... there was something hollow about the whole experience. I complained to my friend the priest. He said, 'You're not down there for self-actualization.'" Geoghegan protests: "I didn't feel any love for them." The priest replies, "So what? ... The church says nothing about that.... Look, these nuns aren't liberals. They are conservative, semi-cloistered, probably in Opus Dei. They don't care about 'love' in our modern, interpersonal way. We, the liberals, want love: we go to soup kitchens to be loved. The nuns go there to feed people. That's it. Give them something to eat." The message, in contrast to Kozol's, is, Watch what I do, not how I feel.

And Geoghegan isn't the only writer covering the poverty beat in fresh ways. Alex Kotlowitz affectingly took his readers inside Chicago's housing projects in *There Are No Children Here*, and Darcy Frey recounted the dreams of several teenagers who hope to escape the ghetto in Coney Island through basketball in *The Last Shot*. Both these books are remarkable for their extensive reporting and for their rhetorical restraint.

But Kozol is neither a particularly good reporter nor particularly involved in his subjects' lives (though he often lets us think otherwise). He can no longer afford to be sanctimonious. I don't doubt his sincerity, but he's simply not serious. He doesn't use his broad popularity among educators, who would follow him anywhere, to promote any particular goals. It's a little late in the education debate to ask, as he does in *Savage Inequalities*, "Why can't we just pour vast amounts of money ... into public education?" How, exactly, does he propose to distribute these funds to, say, the schools in the South Bronx? Several of the borough's poorest school districts have been plagued for years by mismanagement and gross corruption: selling off principalships, embezzling, voter fraud, in one case not even spending the funds that were available. Would he give the money to the districts? To individual schools? To an outside agency, and, if so, public or private? These are not trivial questions. They are the very heart of the matter, but Kozol writes as if serious people hadn't been debating these and other issues for the last thirty years.

III.

It is part of the conventional wisdom among most education pundits that the schools are so bad because the control of them rests in the hands of bureaucrats, who are ensconced in some central board of education, far from the realities of the classroom. If anyone is more removed from the realities of the classroom than education bureaucrats, however, it is the education pundits themselves. A. J. Liebling once divided "writers of news" into three categories, "in inverse order of their worldly consideration":

> 1. The reporter who writes what he sees.
> 2. The interpretive reporter, who writes what he sees and what he construes to be its meaning.
> 3. The expert, who writes what he construes to be the meaning of what he hasn't seen.

Education pundits, by definition, fall into the third camp. "The expert," as Liebling noted, "can put on a better show than the reporter. Logistics ... favor him, since it is possible not to see many things at the same time. For example, a correspondent cannot cover a front and the Pentagon simultaneously. An expert can, and from an office in New York, at that." In the same way, the education pundit can cover the nation's public school system from his post at the think tank.

Nowhere is this more dramatically demonstrated than in John Chubb and Terry Moe's book, *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*, which was published by the Brookings Institute in 1990. They advocated the adoption of "vouchers," government stipends placed in the hands of parents who can use them to send their kids to private or parochial schools, and they claimed to have compiled overwhelming evidence—in the form of a nationwide study of more than 400 schools and 20,000 students—that the public school system as a whole is fatally flawed and should be abolished. At first glance, they seemed to have done the kind of homework that Kozol fails to do.

Berliner and Biddle devote an enormous amount of energy to refuting Chubb and Moe's arguments, but their refutation is not as devastating as the one

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offered by Nicholas Lemann in 1991, when he wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly* that "Chubb and Moe's nationwide study consisted not of visits to the schools but of running the 'data set' called High School and Beyond ... the results of an hour-long standardized test administered twice (in 1980 and 1982) to a large group of high school students, and from the answers to a questionnaire that was distributed to principals and teachers in 1984." As Lemann pointed out, Chubb and Moe dismiss far more comprehensive standardized tests as a hopelessly limited means of assessing school performance. They write that "statewide testing of students can ... be a misleading and counterproductive means of evaluating the performance of schools.... People look at a school's average test scores and jump to conclusions—unwarranted conclusions—about school performance, with far-reaching consequences for their assessments of problems and solutions." Yet these are exactly the kinds of tests that Chubb and Moe use to jump to their own sweeping—and unwarranted—conclusions. It's hard to see how their paper-pushing is any different, at least in kind, from that of most bureaucrats down at central headquarters. Their regression analysis is a little reductive. Regression analysis, indeed.

Vouchers are probably not in the offing, but their initial popularity as a panacea for public schools is indicative of the bifocal vision of many would-be school reformers. They point to the problems in one kind of school—those in ghetto neighborhoods—and then offer solutions directed at parents in more affluent communities. It isn't as if vouchers haven't been tried. As Lemann observed, the idea is really no different from government tuition and job-training grants that used to produce, at least in ghetto communities, the abysmal diploma mills that conservatives usually adduce as examples of wasteful government spending. Lemann noted that "the clinics that have come into being as a result of the Medicaid program (another voucher system without any actual vouchers) do not make for heartening precedents, and they are much more heavily regarded than Chubb and Moe's schools would be."

The standard response to such concerns is to suggest, as Chubb has, that liberals are "really saying that poor people ... [are] 'too stupid' to pick their own schools." The charge stings partly because most progressive educators support "community-based schools." But the implication of Chubb's remark—that poorer parents would do just as good a job as middle-class parents in selecting their children's schools—runs counter to Chubb and Moe's own findings. Their book echoes the conclusions of "Equality of Educational Opportunity," the seminal study by James Coleman, commonly known as the Coleman Report, which was published in 1966.

The report was commissioned by the National Center for Educational Statistics in response to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It was a massive study of thousands of schools across the country, commissioned at the height of the War on Poverty, and everyone expected that the results, which concerned issues of equity for students from different racial and ethnic groups, would show that poor student performance, particularly in ghetto neighborhoods, was due to disparities in school funding between richer and poorer districts. But Coleman, it turned out, was the original neocon. To everyone's shock, he found that students' own family background, and the family backgrounds of other students in their school, was the major determinant of student achievement, and that by implication, school funding had little effect. Thirty years later, every serious liberal commentator on the public schools must still take on Coleman if they wish to argue for increased spending in poorer districts.

Berliner and Biddle point out a number of flaws in Coleman's methods. The study was cross-sectional rather than longitudinal, which means that it measured students' ability once instead of their educational gains over time, and it had very poor criteria for measuring school characteristics. Still, the report has continued to be enormously influential, particularly among conservatives. They do not care to see that Coleman's findings argue strongly against a voucher system. For, if a child's poor education is due almost solely to his or her family background, to parents who are poor, unmotivated and uneducated themselves, then is it really so unreasonable to suggest that these same parents may not morph into sophisticated consumers the minute they get to decide which school gets their tuition dollars?

As Berliner and Biddle persuasively argue, poverty causes bad schools rather than the other way around. For this reason, reforming ghetto schools will almost certainly require far broader efforts to lift more families in ghetto communities above the poverty line. Chubb and Moe look to ghetto schools because they need a genuine crisis to justify their drastic proposals, but their ideas don't really address the problems that plague poorer districts. There is little to suggest that large influxes of unregulated govern-

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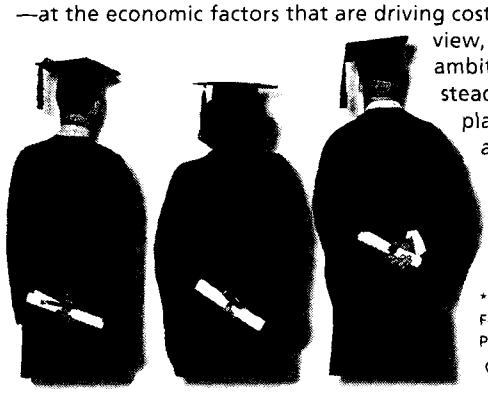

*—William G. Bowen, President, Mellon Foundation; Harold T. Shapiro, President, Princeton University, *from the foreword*

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ment dollars into such neighborhoods would promote any less malfeasance than influxes of regulated dollars have provoked. And in more affluent, suburban communities, there is no need for vouchers. The majority of parents are already happy with their children's schools.

It's invigorating to have liberals such as Berliner and Biddle hitting back effectively with the kind of hard-hearted statistical analysis for which conservatives are famous. The problem is that Berliner and Biddle's arguments are over the top. They're not content to show that their opponents are wrong; they suggest that some sort of conspiracy is afoot to destroy the nation's school system. They hint darkly that "organized malevolence might actually be under way." They call the "manufactured crisis" the "Big Lie," and they compare it to the methods of disinformation and deceit in Nazi Germany. Considering that these authors also maintain that most Americans are perfectly satisfied with their kids' schools, they seem somewhat overwrought. More troubling, they, too, are preaching to the choir. I doubt they'll change many minds. Very, very few education writers are addressing a general audience with any level of sophistication about policy issues. Neither is the current Secretary of Education, whose speeches are largely feel-good exercises. The closest we may have to a public intellectual on education is, surprisingly, Albert Shanker, who has become an increasingly interesting and independent thinker.

Still, Berliner and Biddle's paranoia is not exactly meaningless. It is a useful sign of how besieged many educators feel. And *Dumbing Down Our Kids* is one reason why. Sykes's reporting is no better than Kozol's; he, too, has simply combed the national news for anecdotes that support his thesis. In a system so vast and varied, there will always be examples of every kind of atrocity. Sykes cites the usual horror stories: multicultural curricula, contentless courses, emphasis on "self-esteem" rather than skills. He is often undiscriminating in his attacks: although he constantly reiterates the need for tough academic standards, he is also witheringly sarcastic about recent efforts to create exactly those standards, in the form of national standards or goals. Sykes is contemptuous of teachers. He views them as part of the problem, not as part of the solution. And he never bothers to distinguish among the country's 15,000 school districts. Instead he writes about them as if they were all bad all the time.

Educators have reason to be cynical about some of these broad-based attacks. One of the commonplaces of current educational reform is that school districts should "eliminate waste" at central headquarters and return valuable education dollars to students in the classroom. In New York City, for instance, the city has slashed more than a billion dollars from the school system, much of it from the central Board of Education, and has justified all of these cuts under the rubric of "eliminating waste." But not one cent of the money "saved" has been returned to the classroom; "eliminating waste" has just been a euphemism for "eliminating" funding altogether.

Sykes's all-out assault on the public school system is perhaps more comprehensible if one understands its subtext. His real complaint, I suspect, is with the National Education Association, or NEA, and all that this organization implies: out-of-touch ed-school professors, union officials out for their own gain and, perhaps most worrisome to conservatives, staunch support of Democratic candidates in Congress. (It is certainly true that the NEA has sometimes hindered school reform.) But many of Sykes's ideas are ones that reformers, on both the left and right, already agree to: giving school principals more autonomy over personnel and curricula, and letting schools have more say over their budgets. Many educators with a leftward bent have been fighting for such things for years, but Sykes can't resist attacking them all; at times he seems almost purposely to misconstrue the motives of actual educators, and so he alienates potential allies by denouncing the entire system.

Sykes takes particular joy in mocking examples of ed-school parlance: "hands-on science," "outcome-based education," and the like. He prefers to supplant school principals with business principles. But equally faddish jargon—"synergy," "management by walking around," "wow" products—are just as prevalent in business schools, and Sykes's own prescriptions are no less woolly. "Effective schools," he writes, in a typically negative formulation, "are not characterized by small class sizes, exceptional teachers ... or by the quality or age of the physical plant." Huh? I doubt that most upper-class parents would agree. They pay upwards of $15,000 a year in property taxes or private school tuition for exactly these sorts of things. Sykes says that they're paying for "forceful administrators, high expectations for student achievement, involved parents, and an orderly atmosphere"; but those things don't cost a dime. Maybe Sykes would say that these parents are stupid for wasting their money on other ephemera, but that's not what he implies: he holds up private schools as the very model of success. (Only poorer parents, it seems, are stupid for wanting smaller classes, good teachers and nice facilities.) Anyway, isn't having "high expectations" a criteria for being an "exceptional teacher"? Don't smaller classes help teachers foster "an orderly atmosphere?" Surely such characteristics are not mutually exclusive. But Sykes seems interested only in tearing down.

Like many conservative pundits, Sykes insists that liberals are guilty of foisting their own vision of America on unsuspecting students. He approvingly adduces Hannah Arendt's remark that "in America, education plays a different, and politically, incomparably more important role than in other countries," owing to its historic role in "Americanizing" recent immigrants. Yet Sykes seems unaware that conservatives also use the schools for their own social, political and economic objectives. Whether the debate is about "standards" or "diversity," such terms are almost always stand-ins for more divisive political issues—immigration, integration, racial and gender equality, economic mobility, the role of religion in society—that schools will never be able to address on their own. At the moment, education pundits have begun to resemble parents in an acrimonious divorce: they are using the children as pawns in their war.

IV.

It is not surprising, then, that the most useful books on education tend to come from Liebling's first two categories of "writers of news": that is, teachers and principals actually on the frontlines, and investigative journalists, who spend substantial time in schools and then interpret what they see. Despite Liebling's apparent preference for the humble reporter, it's this last group, that of investigative journalists, which holds the most promise of providing answers to our educational ills.

What the desk-bound critic can add to the education debate is a sense of history. This is exactly what David Tyack and Larry Cuban do in their superb and succinct *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of School Reform.* In less than 150 pages, they calmly put the dense tomes of the education experts in clear perspective. Tyack and Cuban note how Americans have always looked to the nation's schools, with mixed results, to solve certain social, political and economic problems. On the one hand, such utopian thinking has encouraged Americans "to create the most comprehensive system of public schooling in the world." On the other hand, "overpromising has led to disillusionment" and allowed "commentators to blame the schools for problems" beyond their control.

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Tyack and Cuban counter some of the more prevalent claims made by Sykes and other conservatives. They note that comparisons with educational systems of other countries are often misleading because Americans educate a far greater percentage of their population—and educate them longer—than do most other industrialized nations. Since the 1960s, schools and colleges have become dramatically more inclusive and more diverse. Consequently, small aggregate declines in SAT scores from the early 1970s through the mid-1980s, which are often cited as concrete evidence of lower academic standards, are actually due to a broader and ever-changing pool of college applicants. Aggregate scores of SATs are meaningless anyway because the sample each year is self-selective.

In discussing the history of reform, Tyack and Cuban make the crucial distinction, so often overlooked by experts and educators alike, between the ideas of reformers and how (or if) such ideas are implemented in the classroom. What Tyack and Cuban notice is that reforms seldom affect schools in the ways that reformers, or even their opponents, imagine. Teachers have enormous leeway to modify or even to ignore policy prescriptions once they close their classroom doors. Not only do reforms alter schools, schools also alter reforms. The authors also observe that changes that require herculean efforts by teachers to create new materials—and even new schools—from scratch are the least likely to last. (This should give pause to all those who'd like to abolish the public school system and start over.) Yet educators and experts seldom address such issues of replicability when espousing their new ideas.

The "whole language" debacle in California is a good example of how replicability can affect reforms. "Whole language" is an interdisciplinary method of teaching reading that promotes providing students with a literature-rich environment instead of teaching them isolated skills in grammar and phonics. It has been praised by progressive educators as a cure for illiteracy and denounced by conservative pundits as the cause of it. In 1987, the method was abruptly adopted as the "official" way to teach reading in California's public schools. But "whole language" requires supplies and facilities: for instance, an extensive classroom library, with a variety of books at different and appropriate reading levels. Many urban and poorer districts don't even have school libraries, much less ones in individual classrooms; and yet teachers were often asked to forgo the one textbook—the traditional reader—that their schools had supplied them. In my own experience as a teacher, "whole language" works magically when done well. Done poorly, however, it works less well than more traditional methods. Yet it was adopted in schools in California without any concern for whether or not teachers were trained in its use or whether materials were even available to them. Is it any wonder, then, that the reform didn't take? The failure had less to do with "whole language" itself than with the ease of replicating its successes in most classrooms.

So, while educational experts argue over whether schools are too faddish (Sykes's view) or too resistant to change (Kozol's opinion), Tyack and Cuban maintain that neither and both are right. Most changes in the school system over the last century, they insist, have occurred incrementally. What they call "the grammar of schooling"—such familiar practices as the age-grading of students, the division of knowledge into separate subjects and self-contained classrooms—has remained surprisingly consistent. Far from decrying such institutional conservatism, Tyack and Cuban note that teachers, principals and parents—those closest to the classroom—have often been wise to resist reforms imposed on them by outside experts, such as Chubb and Moe, that alter too dramatically this conception of what a "real school" is like. Yet they are not pessimistic, like Kozol, about the slow pace of progress. They note that real and important changes have occurred in the nation's schools over time. Their conclusion is this: "Tinkering is one way of preserving what is valuable and reworking what is not." It is not a thrilling conclusion. It is merely right.

Tyack and Cuban remark that when most people recall good schools—those that they attended or those that their children attended—they remember particular teachers who made a difference in their lives. There's a reason that human-interest stories about teachers who succeed are so popular. For most people, *Dangerous Minds* will always be more appealing and instructive than "Dangerous Vouchers." Tyack and Cuban helpfully redefine reform as "change where it counts most—in the daily interactions of teachers and students," and note that it is both "the hardest to achieve and the most important."

In recent years, politicians and pundits increasingly have dismissed or ignored the role of teachers when designing reforms. Teachers have been cast as greedy incompetents who just want their paychecks. It is often suggested that the schools could be saved simply by getting

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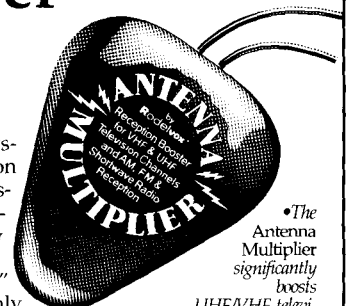

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rid of the teachers' union. The legislative impracticability of this aside, reformers would do more good by attacking particular provisions in union contracts. There's no doubt that such contracts have sometimes served as obstacles to innovation; but in poorer, urban districts, such as in New York, the union has also been the only force assuring minimal conditions in the schools. I have no doubt that, but for the union, class sizes in the city might top fifty or sixty students.

As Tyack and Cuban note, most teachers enter the profession out of a genuine love of their subject and a desire to help kids learn. Tyack and Cuban admonish educational experts for not consulting teachers more, for not even attempting to understand what motivates and discourages teachers most. To such experts, Tyack and Cuban offer this advice: "One place to start is to ask teachers what bothers them the most and to begin reforms there." They do not mean to say that teachers have "a monopoly" on educational wisdom, only that "their firsthand perspectives on schools and their responsibility for carrying out official policies argues for their centrality in school reform efforts." And they forcefully remark upon the utter futility of trying to effect reform by doing an end run around those actually in the classroom: "Teacher-proof instruction is as foolish as student-proof learning." What could be more obvious?

The public school system may be the only battlefront in the world that looks better up close than it does from a distance. And so, perhaps not surprisingly, the most optimistic books about education tend to come from educators on the front lines. In *The Power of Their Ideas*, Deborah Meier recounts how she created a series of small, successful alternative public schools in East Harlem in the late 1970s and early '80s. At the time Meier was just another schoolteacher frustrated by the system, but in 1974, a reform-minded superintendent, Anthony Alvarado, offered her an opportunity to start her own school in a few classrooms inside another building. She could hire her own staff; and although such freedom was against union rules, no one intervened, at least initially. She began with a few teachers and less than 100 students. An answering machine served as the office secretary.

She had to attract her own students; parents were free to send their kids to the school or to pull them out if they became dissatisfied with Meier's program, in what became billed as "school choice." Her little "school within a school" was successful. It grew, and more schools like it sprouted in East Harlem. Soon Meier was something of a legend. Now she is helping to administer the Annenberg grant in New York—part of the $500 million that Walter K. Annenberg has pledged to reform public school education nationwide.

Meier's book is indicative of just how bifurcated the education writer's audience has become. She never seems entirely certain whom she is addressing: policymakers, or the public, or other educators trying to implement similar reforms. At times her tone is lofty, as if she were giving an academic lecture on educational philosophy since Dewey. At other moments she's more casual and forthright; the book contains journal entries from her days as a school director in which she confesses, with a heartening humanity, her impatience in a long-winded meeting with colleagues, her embarrassment at ed-school speak, her doubts about how she handled a particular student or crisis. The best bits are when she describes the nuts and bolts of her reforms: smaller classes and schools, choice and school autonomy, in which teachers and principals get to design their own curricula. Meier's ideas are not so different from some of the reforms that Sykes suggests. Unlike so many commentators, however, she isn't essentially ideological. Her views are grounded in everyday realities.

Meier puts more stock in her particular pedagogical approach than I would. I think that her schools work not so much because she emphasizes, say, "hands-on" learning, but because the teachers in those schools all share the same educational philosophy—and because the schools and the classes are small enough so that teachers can teach and engage their students individually. No kids get lost. Meier also sees "size" as crucial: ideally, no class should have more than twenty students and, for the same reasons, no school's staff should have more than twenty teachers. No school, consequently, should have more than 400 students.

Smaller classes have long been the chief pedagogical tool of private schools and are increasingly becoming the concern of suburban public school parents. Yet many education experts, particularly conservatives such as Sykes, have consistently dismissed class size as irrelevant to student performance. One suspects that this position, as is the case with so many conservative arguments, is simply a justification for not spending more on overcrowded urban schools, rather than a fair analysis of the evidence. For research now exists that provides unambiguous proof that the reduction of class size in the elementary grades dramatically improves student performance, regardless of the school or student background. What's more, this research comes from conservative quarters.

From 1985 to 1989, the state of Tennessee, under Governor Lamar Alexander, conducted a statewide study of the effect of smaller classes on student performance. As Frederick Mosteller, the study's author, notes, "Because of the potential expense of a reduction in class size for the

Solitude

This is Solitude where the altitude's
over 10,000 feet, and I've been skiing
Rhapsody, Concord, Vertigo and Paradise.

It's blizzarding so all the chutes
(black diamonds) look the same; their inclines,
since snow's thigh deep and visibility

none, seem gently pitched. I've been out for hours
and soon the lifts will shut. Stopping to clear
fogged-up goggles at the Ski Patrol's hut,

I meet three men plus River, their retriever,
who sniffs out skiers sunk in avalanches.
I shed a layer, then two. My white hair

turns wet, takes time to dry, beside the stove.
They say roads will close; one suggests I share
his cot, as if safe haven may be found

in romance. I grope for the Milky Way
inside my pocket, for some reassurance
of food, consoled by all the snow outside,

enough to drink and bathe in. Wool hanging
on knobs sizzles, while goggles decondense.
I'd like to tell these men about

solitude, how I'd translate the root, *sol*,
for sun, instead of *solus*, for alone,
while I pull on soggy sweaters, zip parka,

pushing the door open onto white fields.
I snap up boots, click bindings, and recover
concord, rhapsody, paradise; plunge down.

Elise Paschen

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early grades, members of the Tennessee legislature felt that the proposed innovation should be based on solid information and therefore that a well-conducted study of class size should be carried out." Quite so. The legislature provided funds to reduce the class size in seventy-nine different schools across the state, from kindergarten through the fourth grade. Classes were selected randomly, and were divided into three groups: "1) small: 13-17 pupils 2) regular: 22-25 students and 3) regular size with a teacher aide: 22-25 students." (It should be noted that even these regular classes are considerably smaller than those in many urban districts, where even elementary schools have classes of thirty students or more.) Besides providing funds for reducing class size, no other assistance to the schools was provided. Over the four years, student performance was regularly assessed not only with standardized tests, but with curriculum-based tests as well.

The Tennessee study found that class size appreciably affected student performance, boosting reading and math scores over time, and also that these effects held well into junior high, even after students were returned to regular-size classes. Students in the smallest classes, in every kind of school, did better than their counterparts in regular classes, even when those classes had aides. As Mosteller concludes: "The main finding was that a small class size in the earliest grades—kindergarten, first, second, and third—speeds learning in these years and confers lasting benefits into later grades to students with this start." Unlike so many reforms, this is one that is concrete, easily measurable and easily replicable.

As long as schools in this country remain local, there is little that one can say about them that applies across the system. They can only be viewed individually, which is what Mike Rose does in *Possible Lives: The Promise of Education in America.* What makes Rose's book so distinctive is that he is exquisitely aware of the pitfalls of the genre in which he writes. His book is beautifully written. And its strength is owed to the fact that Rose has actually gone out and visited schools. For four years, he criss-crossed the country, observing classrooms in such disparate places as Kentucky, New York City, rural Montana and Mississippi. "The journey," he writes, "was an odd one for me." A former teacher, Rose is the author of *Lives on the Boundary,* about his experiences teaching in the Los Angeles ghetto where he grew up: "My work in the classroom has mostly been with people whom our schools, public and private, have failed."

Rose finds not the hopelessness that Kozol or Sykes find, but individual rooms—"vital, varied"—in which teachers are succeeding, in every kind of setting, with every kind of student, using every kind of approach. And because his book is filled with such rich specificity, it's one of the few books about education that can't be summed up in a sound-bite: "dumbing down kids," "the manufactured crisis," "savage inequalities." What Rose does provide is a sense of the enormous variety and range. He rightly insists that reforming schools will invariably involve creating the circumstances—what he'd call the conditions of democracy—so that learning, whatever its particular forms, can occur. One still wishes that he were more concrete about those particular forms: more autonomy at the school level, smaller schools and classes, and a very specific idea of what the mission and methods of a school are.

Rose takes no unpopular positions. (What does he think about competency tests for teachers, or about opening up the profession to those without traditional education degrees?) Still, he is not blind to incompetence or injustice. He observes that "the national discussion of the problems in our schools, as ever present and sweeping as it is, seems much of the time to be incomplete, narrow, somehow lacking: failure of will, declining standards, bureaucracy." And he turns to the matter of language. "Perhaps its limitations are to be found in the crisis rhetoric itself," he writes:

> a rhetoric that levels nuance and variation, and leads readily to stark and simplified models of cause and effect in the nation's schools—with overtones of a fall from pre-crisis grace and the promise of a post-reform redemption.... Whatever the case, the solutions offered in our reform literature seem one-dimensional, at times utopian. ("By the year 2000, all children will be ready to learn," reads the first of our National Educational Goals), and the analysis of problems in the schools seems thin and acontextual, and, well, bloodless.

Of all the new education books, Rose's book is the only one to suggest that we need a new way to talk about idealism.

V.

As Rose rightly points out, the promises of school reformers have never been known for their modesty. With the Edison Project, Christopher Whittle promised that his "for-profit" schools would be to the current system as the lightbulb was to the candle. The National American School Development Corporation pledged to create "break-the-mold" schools. George Bush's "America 2000" promised that, by the turn of the century, "every school will be free of drugs and violence," that "every American adult will be literate," that "American students will be first in science and math." Bill Clinton's "Goals 2000" is little more than a watered-down version of his predecessor's plan, if such a thing is possible. Is it any wonder that Americans have come to view all these promises with skepticism? Who really expects anyone to fulfill such wild, utopian claims?

In the past several months, however, Clinton has shown an admirable tendency to become concrete, by advocating school uniforms and coming out for "national standards" against considerable opposition from both the left and the right. Giving principals and teachers more control over their schools and budgets—as many educators, as disparate as Sykes and Meier, have demanded—will work only if there are standard measures that parents can use to compare schools across cities and states. In a nation with a population as mobile as America's, moreover, it is imperative that children who change schools because their parents change jobs be able to pick up in their new schools where they left off in their old ones. (As it stands, a child's chances of dropping out of school increase nearly 3 percent every time he or she relocates, regardless of family income or background.) In the coming years, the system will also face a massive shortage of teachers, as those who entered the profession in the 1960s begin to retire, and a new demographic bulge of students moves through the system. Already, poorer urban districts, such as those in Los Angeles, are struggling to fill teaching jobs. Clinton has the opportunity to influence what goes on in the nation's classrooms for years to come by helping to determine who will fill these posts. He should simultaneously argue for raising the academic qualifications of teachers and for easing the more onerous certification requirements to lure more qualified people into the profession; and he should call for reducing class size all across the country.

To improve public education, even gradually, we need not a better understanding of conservatism or liberalism, but a better understanding of idealism. Idealism is a part of the job description of a teacher, and so the fortunes of idealism bear directly on our comprehension of what is possible in our schools. It is always unattractive to seem churlish about idealism, or to argue against it; but it is necessary to say that there are styles of idealism that do it, and the schools, no good. In recent years, idealism in America has become little more than a warm, fuzzy feeling. But nobody's problem was ever solved because somebody felt deeply about it. Sentimentality is not practical. It is not even moral. It is just sentimental. To

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fix a problem, one needs not only ideals, but also tools; and in their application to the human world, tools are usually messy and imprecise instruments. Idealism that is not informed by realism is just high-sounding cynicism.

To insist that educators perform miracles in dilapidated and overcrowded schools, with few supplies, and with little support in communities that are being destroyed by poverty and violence, is *not* idealism. Idealism is well-served only by concreteness, by practicality, by a familiarity with, and an appreciation for, those close to the problem, close to the ground. A genuine idealist gets his or her hands dirty. Otherwise, loftiness and outrage and all the other intensities that characterize our educational preachments are a measure only of their distance from the crisis. Credit goes to the men and women in the classroom. •

Ideas Had Consequences

By Eugene D. Genovese

Richard M. Weaver, 1910-1963: A Life of the Mind by Fred Douglas Young

(University of Missouri Press, 215 pp., $39.95)

"There is ground for declaring that modern man has become a moral idiot." Thus wrote Richard M. Weaver in 1948 in *Ideas Have Consequences*, explaining that "For four centuries every man has been not only his own priest but his own professor of ethics, and the consequence is an anarchy which threatens even that minimum consensus of value necessary to the political state." Contemplating the wreckage, he added that we must ask "in all seriousness" whether men any longer even wanted to live in other than a state of animality.

The author of those words was a dangerous man. He had an extraordinary talent for shredding claptrap. Weaver's plain speaking, buttressed by clear thinking and extensive learning, helps to explain the silent treatment that his work has received from the makers and shakers of academia; but he deserves to rank among the most significant intellectuals of America in this century. For this reason, let us welcome Fred Douglas Young's able study of the man and his work. Young catches Weaver's spirit and offers a valuable introduction to the thought of a man who deserves to be read widely and carefully.

Richard Weaver was born in 1910 and died in 1963. He hailed from the town of Weaverville in western North Carolina, but grew up in Lexington, Kentucky. As a student at the University of Kentucky, he enthusiastically embraced socialism and became secretary of the Socialist Party's branch on campus. An admirer of the British Labor Party and the French left, he especially welcomed their resistance to the militarism that had generated one world war and was threatening to generate another. He supported the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War and participated in the widespread resistance to ROTC on American campuses.

He proceeded to Vanderbilt University for a master's degree in English. There he fell under the spell of John Crowe Ransom and David Davidson, leaders in the newly resurgent conservatism of the group that brought out *I'll Take My Stand* in 1931. He did not then abandon socialism, as eventually he would, but he did already have a problem with it. He admired socialism but found most socialists dreary, narrow-minded, hate-driven people; he opposed conservatism but found men such as Ransom, Davidson and Cleanth Brooks humane and admirable. He slowly began to suspect a correlation between the ideas of the radical left and the kind of people it attracted or shaped. He was neither the first nor the last to squirm over that unpleasant discovery. After two unhappy years as a teacher at Texas A&M, Weaver went to Louisiana State University for his doctorate, writing his dissertation on the transformation of Southern thought after the Civil War under Cleanth Brooks, and in 1944 he was appointed to the faculty of the University of Chicago, where he spent the rest of a career marked by a slow shift to the right.

Throughout his life Weaver hated totalitarianism in all its forms. He came to praise the Southern tradition of chivalry and constitutional restraint as a bulwark against fascism, Nazism and Stalinism. Weaver described George Fitzhugh's *Sociology of the South* (1854) as "unique in the boldness of its attack on the theory of free society and its remarkable foreshadowing of the corporate state ... an outline of the totalitarian state, which substitutes for individual liberty and free competition a fixed hierarchy and state provision for all classes." Thus he recoiled from the proslavery social thought of Fitzhugh, which he saw as an antebellum Southern harbinger of twentieth-century totalitarianism and the brutal exploitation of the working class. Young claims, quite plausibly, that Weaver's critique of totalitarianism foreshadowed those of Hannah Arendt, Thomas Molnar and Jean Francois Revel. Indeed, as Young's thoughtful account of Weaver's intellectual journey demonstrates, he ranged from philosophy to literary criticism to studies of rhetoric to political theory, all with the purpose of constructing a powerful criticism of man's attempt to live without God and the revealed truth that alone can anchor civilized life and arrest the rampant atomization of modern life.

Weaver attracted national attention in 1948 with *Ideas Have Consequences*. To his surprise, his book won the admiration also of prominent left-wing intellectuals. W. E. B. DuBois lamented what he considered its antidemocratic bent but acknowledged the quality of its author's mind, and Paul Tillich warmly praised it as daring, radical and brilliantly written. *Ideas Have Consequences* and the posthumously published *Visions of Order* (1964) breathe a fierce revulsion at the horrors of World War II and the totalitarian regimes that sparked it. Weaver had found the idea of original sin "archaically funny" until the atrocities that culminated in the Holocaust and Hiroshima shocked him into a confrontation with radical evil. "During the recent war," he wrote, "what person of feeling was not struck by the insanity of hearing advertisements for laxatives between announcements of the destruction of famous cities by aerial bombardment?"

So appalled was Weaver at Hiroshima and Nagasaki that he could not bring himself to endorse atomic research even for peaceful purposes. He condemned South Carolina for agreeing to become a primary site for research on the hydrogen bomb. How, he asked, could South Carolina betray its chivalric tradition and accept a project "which prepares for indiscriminate slaughter on a scale not hitherto contemplated?" Weaver gagged on the spectacle of "total war" and the godless ideologies that made it possible. Turning back to the nineteenth century, he excoriated the scientistic theories—positivism, Marxism and Darwinism among

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others—that plunged Western culture into a despiritualization that steadily undermined the idea of objective truth. It was the possibility of objective truth, for Weaver, that alone could properly ground humane social relations. His search for the roots of this greatest of heresies led him back to the later Middle Ages and the emergence of nominalism.

Weaver saw nominalism as the philosophical basis of a radical egalitarianism that was steadily leading to a rejection of all authority as intrinsically illegitimate. Weaver directed his fire at William of Occam, who "propounded the fateful doctrine of nominalism, which denies that universals have a real existence." For Weaver, the ultimate issue was "whether there is a source of truth higher than and independent of man." The practical result of nominalism, Weaver wrote, "is to banish the reality which is perceived by the intellect and to posit as reality that which is perceived by the senses." For Weaver, men stood as spiritual equals in the sight of God and for that reason deserved to stand as equals before the law; but he had little patience with doctrines that denied structure and hierarchy in nature and human life. He believed that, without acceptance of the absolute standard found in the Decalogue, man lost all self-control and restraint and transformed his own thoughts and feelings into the measure of all things. Weaver's criticism of what he wonderfully called "spoiled child psychology" ranks among the best yet penned. Weaver recoiled from the atomization propelled by a rampant secular individualism. There were problems, to be sure, with Weaver's account: he never did explain, for example, how the scientific revolution, the fruits of which he never wholly repudiated, could have emerged without the nominalism that he so despised. But his analysis was devastating.

In an extraordinary essay on "The Older Religiousness of the South," Weaver stressed the piety of the country and town folks. Like the Agrarians before him, he thought that they "knew little and probably cared less about casuistical theology." He was wrong. Also like the Agrarians before him, he does not seem to have investigated the subject very carefully. He certainly showed little acquaintance with the work of the South's leading nineteenth-century theologians—an intellectually outstanding group—and little knowledge of the ways in which they shaped the Southern education. His own religious thought remains elusive. It suggests a genuine Christian piety combined with a skeptical attitude toward particular doctrines. His enthusiasm for John Crowe Ransom's *God without Thunder*, which he regarded as the most profound of the works of the Agrarians, suggests that he may well have shared Ransom's rejection of Jesus as the Christ, although not Ransom's contempt for Jesus the moral teacher.

Our primary task, Weaver believed, is to recover piety and an adherence to the truth of the Decalogue and its implicit demand for what he suggestively called "a social bond individualism"—that is, a firm respect for the dignity of each person, understood as a creature of God, and a no less firm respect for the rights and duties of the community as a whole. Weaver did not wallow in reactionary illusions of some grand restoration of the past. Instead, in Young's words, he called "for a return to some sort of metaphysical theological integrating vision." We might note that a similar plea has come from the far left, notably from Roberto Mangabeira Unger, the doyen of Critical Legal Studies, whose work the left endlessly praises without paying the slightest attention to its spiritual and philosophical thrust.

The abasement of language, in Weaver's view, was a prominent symptom of moral corruption. In *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (1953), and in the essays collected in *Language Is Sermonic* (1970), he defended dialectical reasoning from definitions and illustrated his argument with positive assessments of the style of both Lincoln and Calhoun. He also questioned Edmund Burke's status as a conservative icon, since Burke, despite his profession of conservative principles, was anything but conservative in arguing from circumstance. Thus, while Weaver admired Burke and drew heavily on his discrete insights, he distrusted the specifics of Burke's attack on the French Revolution and paeans to tradition. For Weaver, one's "method of argument is a truer index to his beliefs than his explicit profession of principles." In taking his stand on Platonic ground, Weaver departed from the stance of others in the Southern conservative tradition, most notably the late M.E. Bradford, who, more than any other, had the right to claim Weaver's mantle. At the heart of this family quarrel lies a problem that Young should have considered: Weaver was, in effect, calling for a comprehensive conservative philosophy, while Bradford, who prized historical experience above everything except religious faith, would have none of it.

Influenced by classical Greek and Roman literature, Weaver focused on rhetoric as the frontline in the struggle against cultural barbarism. Weaver refused, Young properly insists, to "yield proprietorship of the word *rhetoric* to those who were mere sophists." As Young explains, "Since rhetoric dealt with human nature in all its fullness and complexity, Weaver felt compelled to inveigh against modern sophists, in whatever guise, who saw language as nothing more than a weapon or tool to make the worst appear the better. Such prostitution of words made losers of us all.... *The Ethics of Rhetoric* was a Weaverian manifesto declaring that words had vital referents, and that meaning might be saved only if they were used properly." Significantly, Thomas M. Conley's highly regarded *Rhetoric in the European Tradition* (1990), which Young does not cite, called attention to Weaver as one of the major contributors to the resurrection of rhetoric as a living subject in contemporary intellectual discourse.

At his best, Weaver focused on the social relations that underlie—or remain inseparable from—the spiritual crisis, and, like many generations of Southern conservative critics, he launched a broadside attack on corporate capitalism. Weaver attacked corporate capitalism and, more specifically, "industrialism" as a self-revolutionizing system that produced the atomization he deplored. It is the "very nature" of corporate capitalism "to unsettle any establishment and initiate the endless innovation of technological progress." Like the Agrarians, however, Weaver could find no solution other than a will-o'-the-wisp return to small property.

Unfortunately, Weaver's cultural criticism suffered from his idealist bias. Sounding a little like Lenin, he described socialism as a system that nationalized and extended the concentration of economic and political power begun by the rise of big business; but Lenin aside, Southern conservatives (and many other conservatives) have paid dearly for their slighting of Marx, and the ex-socialist Weaver had less excuse than most. It is true that Weaver's socialism derived largely from Norman Thomas and the Christian socialists, but even they could have taught him to pay closer attention to the material basis of society and, especially, to the centrality of social relations to moral struggles. Brecht may be charged with cynicism for announcing, "first feed the face, and then talk right and wrong," but the hard kernel of truth in his outburst cannot be ignored.

As part of a larger project of social renewal, Weaver produced illuminating studies of American and especially Southern cultural development, and these studies have yet to be properly appreciated. One matter that Young notices barely, if at all, is the reception of Weaver's doctoral dissertation, written

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in 1943. That reception, or lack of one, ranks as something of a minor academic scandal. It would take little effort to demonstrate that leading Southern historians have read it and mined it for their own work without bothering to credit it properly or even to cite it at all. The scandal attached to the reception of the belatedly published version, *The Southern Tradition at Bay* (1968), is not quite so minor. Here is one of the seminal books on the New South and certainly the most penetrating study of its intellectual and ideological developments. And just try to find it on the reading lists assigned to undergraduate or graduate students. Go through the principal works on the subject and see for yourself how many authorities even bother to mention it in bibliographies that are otherwise crowded with lightweight books and articles.

In this delightful era of diversity, the contributions of Southern conservatives are placed beyond the pale. *The Southern Tradition at Bay* is especially offensive to those who prate endlessly about the priority of "gender," for they have to choke on the painstaking, sympathetic, respectful attention that Weaver pays to women writers. Indeed, no book on the history of the New South comes close to matching its appreciation of the depth and the breadth of the contributions made by women writers such as Augusta Jane Evans. But alas and woe unto us: Weaver establishes beyond doubt that the most gifted of those women writers—and the best of them were wonderfully gifted—wrote from a perspective that offers no comfort to radical feminist nonsense. Those who demand that we hear the women's voices of the past, it seems, mean only the voices of women who would be members of NOW and NARAL in the present.

The fashionable dismissal of Weaver's cultural studies as mere Southern apologetics will not bear scrutiny. It is enough to note that, despite his admiration for the political thought of Calhoun, he concluded that Calhoun's version of the protection of minority rights ended as little more than a defense of slavery. Indeed, he groaned that postbellum white Southerners sloughed off most of the virtues of their fathers and grandfathers while they retained little more than their dogged commitment to the notion of black inferiority.

Young emphatically refuses to pigeonhole Weaver as a latter-day "Agrarian," or as a Southern traditionalist, or even as a "conservative," as that term is usually used. Although Weaver worked with William Buckley and Russell Kirk, he never quite fit in anywhere. Early in the cold war, Weaver, notwithstanding his hostility to communism and the Soviet Union, denounced the Mundt-Nixon Bill, which would have compelled the registration of American Communists. In 1960, he lashed out against those who feared change and wallowed in the status quo. For him principles were everything: "Man in this world cannot make his will his law without any regard to limits and to the fixed nature of things."

Young believes that Weaver was striking out on an idiosyncratic path of his own. I suspect that this view does some injustice to Weaver and to conservatism, though Young is certainly right that such labels are too constricting to capture the complexity of Weaver's thought. And yet Weaver did speak of himself as a conservative even as he lashed out at mindless right-wingers. "A conservative," he wrote, "is a realist, who believes that there is a structure of reality independent of his own will and desire ... a creation that was here before him, which exists now not by just his sufferance, and which will be here after he's gone." A true conservative, he concluded, stands "on the terra firma of antecedent reality; having accepted some things as given, lasting, and good, he is in a position to use his effort where effort will produce solid results." Solid results are what Richard Weaver produced.

EUGENE D. GENOVESE's most recent book is *The Southern Front: History and Politics in the Cultural War* (University of Missouri Press).

Airheart

BY FRANCIS SPUFFORD

I Was Amelia Earhart by Jane Mendelsohn

(Knopf, 148 pp., $18)

To a novelist, the real people of the past are coalesced masses of characteristics learnable from the work of biographers or historians; inert, yet available to be woken. But animating a celebrity, and a comparatively recent celebrity, is inevitably a double process. You enter not only the person, but also the envelope of their fame; their mind, and then their persona, a thing determined very variously in collaboration with the world, concerted between the actual body of the person and the bank of night-blooming camera flashes which greeted them at train stations. You find that you need to make some judgments—some discriminations—that aren't purely a matter of the assessment of past character. These are judgments that concern the amount of the cloud of legend that you are going to admit into the intimate movements of mind and body you attribute to that past self. How much, and in what ways, you're going to treat their fame as part of them.

Judging by Doris Rich's 1989 biography, Amelia Earhart (1897-1937) was a contained and fastidious person. Her upbringing in an imprudent Kansas family—Old Money minus the money—taught her not to rely on anyone. She would never marry, she told her friends, because no man would accept the equal importance of her ambitions. Her friends called her "boyish," meaning perhaps that she got single-mindedly excited over things as male children are encouraged to do. She kept a scrapbook of successes by women at law, medicine, pistol-shooting, business—everything. Men's looks gave her a detached pleasure; she nursed the ruined bodies of First World War gas casualties in Toronto, and became a pacifist.

In the early 1920s she took her first flying lessons in California. But the feat that made her famous overnight was a publicity-stunt crossing of the Atlantic as a male pilot's passenger. (A London newspaper viciously remarked that she could have been replaced by a sheep, for all the difference she had made.) The real achievements that followed happened against a background of adulation. Part of this adulation was organized by George Palmer Putnam, the publisher and publicist who had recruited her for the Atlantic crossing: she married him, the only man in North America who had a direct stake in the continuation of her career. And part of the adulation simply clustered around her: glorification in a host of shadings from a Depression-era public eager to believe.

She landed her autogiro unannounced in Zanesville, Ohio, wove a ring of daisies for a small girl onlooker, helped wash the dishes in the household that put her up.

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Then flew on: completing an occasion with a folksy magic to it, something like a Ray Bradbury story, as if an everyday goddess had descended to bless the town. Other encounters with public appetite were ordeals, poised on the edge of hysteria. If the tone of these had had an author, though, it would not have been Ray Bradbury, it would have been Nathanael West. "Oh, I got a good look at her that time!" shrieked a woman in West Virginia who got behind the curtain after a lecture. At Newark Field in 1936, panicky police trying to whisk her away from a crowd of 3,000 rubberneckers dragged her arms and legs in opposite directions.

It is impossible to tell how good a pilot Earhart was, because every contemporary judgment seems polarized by the facts of her notoriety and her gender. As an aviator, she was reflexively praised or reflexively damned. What one can know is the determination with which, for example, she effaced the Atlantic stunt of 1928 with a genuine solo transit in 1932. She possessed an unforced reckless turn of mind ready to spend the future for the sake of the instant's bravery. She left a letter to be opened by her father if the Atlantic killed her. "Hooray for the grand adventure! I wish I had won, but it was worthwhile anyway. You know that." Earhart's life presents that satisfying trope in which a hero's mask, crass and gaudy, proves to conceal the face of a real hero.

This is the biography that has been transformed by Jane Mendelsohn into a novel. Mendelsohn has roused it to an elegant and extremely concentrated life, which allows an explicit grammatical space for the accommodation of celebrity. Told in both the first person and the third person, *I Was Amelia Earhart* loops Earhart across "I" and "she": "Sometimes my thoughts are clearly mine, I hear them speak to me, in my own voice. Other times I see myself from far away, and my thoughts are ghostly, aerial, in the third person." Even when this Earhart speaks in the first person, the "I" is sometimes a fusion of the individual and the legend. "It was 1937. I was thirty-nine. I was more beautiful than ever, but an aura of unhappiness travelled with me, like the trail of a falling comet." A star's self-summary, "I was more beautiful than ever," is not a thought that could plausibly have originated in the private woman.

By 1937 Earhart's trademark curled bob was turning to a thatch of hair; her face was baked and exhausted. She had always maintained a conscious glamour, dry Ivy-League feminine on the ground, a tough mix of silk and leather for the air, and rather enjoyed it in a skeptical sort of way—the "Amelia Earhart"-branded luggage and clothes for "active living"

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In order to promote the Middle East peace process the United States and even Israel try to keep Syria and its president Hafez Assad engaged. It is hoped that Syrian collaboration and at least minimal concessions can be obtained. But we must ask ourselves whether Syria is a reliable partner in any peace agreement and whether Israel, from which many "concessions for peace" are being asked, would be wise to entrust its security to Syrian promises.

What are the facts?

A Rogue Country and a Rogue President. Syria is an outlaw country and is classified as a "terrorist state" by the United States. Terror is the most pervasive aspect of the Syrian regime. Much of that terror is conducted through "clients", such as the terrorist bands of the PLO, the infamous Hamas, and the Iran-sponsored Hizbullah, to all of which Syria extends protection and warm hospitality. Syria's most ruthless terror, however, is reserved for its internal opposition. In 1982, President Assad put down a rebellion in the town of Hama, in which he killed 20,000 people.

More cunning even than his Iraqi counterpart, President Saddam Hussein, he shares with him utter ruthlessness, disregard of human life, and above all an abiding hatred of the West, which means primarily the "big-devil", the United States and the "little devil", Israel, the perceived outpost of Western culture, of Western democratic concepts, and of "American imperialism" in the Middle East.

Main sources of Syria's revenue are the large-scale and officially conducted narcotics trade, and massive counterfeiting of American currency. Few doubt that Mr. Assad personally authorized the suicide attack on the Marine barracks in Beirut in which 241 Americans lost their lives and in the blowing up of Pan Am Flight #103, in which 270 people died. Even today, Assad gives hospitality to surviving thugs of the Nazi regime, outstanding among them Alois Bruner, Eichman's deputy and main slaughterer. The terror in Israeli cities could not possibly occur if President Assad were to forbid it.

The Obsession with the Golan. Since the founding of Israel in 1948, Syria has attacked it three times, by surprise and without provocation. In the Six-Day War of 1967, Syria suffered a decisive defeat and lost the Golan Heights, a Queens-sized plateau. Israel has been in possession ever since. The Golan is of vital strategic importance to Israel because it makes a Syrian attack against Israel virtually impossible. On the Golan, Israel is protected by sophisticated electronic surveillance and warning systems and by one of the deepest and most formidable obstacle systems in the world. The Golan is desolate and serves no real purpose, except as a defense post for Israel or as an attack-launching pad for Syria. Syria is obsessed with the Golan and has stated over and over again that it will not make peace with Israel unless and until the Golan is handed back in its entirety. But if such an exchange—the Golan Heights for peace—should come about, Israel's continued existence or destruction would depend on the good will of the Syrian dictator or his successor. It's a risk that Israel should not be asked to assume.

"For Israel to survive, the Golan must stay in Israeli hands. The Golan is the price the Syrians must pay for their aggressions. All things considered, it's a small price."

The conflict between Syria and other Arabs with Israel is not about land—it is about Israel's very existence. No other country in the world would be expected to yield indispensable strategic ground to those who are sworn to destroy it. One may ask why Israeli leaders, among them experienced generals, would wish to consider such a gamble. But leaders do make fatal errors in judgment. We only need to remember British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, who in his quest for peace agreed to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia and thus brought about the Second World War. Considering that Syria is a rogue country with a rogue president, Israel should not make its survival dependent on Syria's "goodwill". Yes, there must be concessions. But, for Israel to survive, the Golan must stay in Israeli hands. The Golan is the price the Syrians must pay for their aggressions. All things considered, it's a small price.

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weren't purely schemes by her husband. A perceptive friend had praised her at 22 for "a strangely poetic beauty which did not depend on regularity of feature or perfection of bodily structure." Instead—dispiritingly, predictably, sympathetically—she thought her thighs were too fat. Beauty of a conventional 1930s variety was attributed to her because it was stipulated by her role: it was necessary that she be beautiful, as it was necessary that Joan of Arc be beautiful. An aviatrix must be that. Mendelsohn's Earhart speaks for the role, too.

But the effect is measured. By incorporating her fame, Mendelsohn's fictional Earhart molds fame into a willed thing. The novel makes her more purely confident of herself, makes her what she is because to a stylized degree she has chosen to be it. It hushes the voices talking to Earhart and softens the buffetting of events. Incidents become decisions. The historical Earhart wore a leather coat when she was learning to fly. She deliberately wrinkled and stained it after the guys in the hangar made jokes about "dude aviators" on the coat's first outing. Their laughter vanishes in Mendelsohn's novel: "I slept in it the first night I bought it because I loved it and because I wanted to break it in."

Instead the novel reproduces the conflicts of Earhart's life, which it has taken inside the wide hoop of "I" and "she" together, as strains within that expanded selfhood. The novel translates mundane tussles into internal disturbances accessible to the tools of reflection: Mendelsohn writes prose in small mirror pieces, not worldly expanses. Her simplification is a paring of the elements of Earhart till they can be worked on by a lyric intelligence. It is also a diagnosis. Earhart had troubles in her last years. The phase of opportunity for female flyers was passing. Putnam had begun to bully: "Stop your sniveling!" someone heard him snap at her. In the novel, these problems cease to be external to her. Instead, Mendelsohn makes her experience a crisis of vocation, a loss of inner altitude: "I was risking my life without ever having lived it." Her disappearance in 1937 provides the moment at which Mendelsohn can begin to do something about that.

Of course, we want Earhart's disappearance, flying round the Equator in a Lockheed Electra with a navigator named Fred Noonan, to have been purposeful. The baldness of her radio silence over the South Pacific seems incommensurate with the importance of her death—though in other moods the immediacy of death in the air forms part of the romantic intensity of flight as we imagine it. That is why, in 1937, speculations multiplied about a secret rationale for the apparent accident: stories were told in which the Japanese captured her or she was on a mission for FDR. Mendelsohn has Earhart and Noonan float down onto a convenient desert island, and in so doing Mendelsohn may seem to be making a similar protest at the anticlimax of mortality.

But she has a more ambiguous extension to Earhart's story in mind; it's true, a further reach of life than the record allows, an extra leg for Earhart to fly during which she can sift amply among the unsolved puzzles of herself—but one conjured from dreamtime. Earhart and Noonan are in an equatorial sky shuddering with heat, lost and dehydrated. Then she's feeling the "metal skeleton" of the Electra scrape earthward through air. Then there's the island, a desert island diagram, without there being a moment of landfall between which would have forced Mendelsohn to state how real these events are. She writes with a liquid compression; and, like flailing swimmers pulling each other down into lower and lower strata of the sea, Earhart, then Noonan, then Earhart again more deeply, succumb to the delirium of isolation on the tropical shore; which is not a destructive process but a journey of the soul. On her island, Earhart passes through madness into the discovery of her own largeness. She realizes that what she "had considered to be her self all these years was only a magnified detail of an enormous painting.... The sky, however wide and smeared with thick painterly clouds, now seems to her only one square inch of an infinite fresco of the world." Even a renewed flight in the beached silver Electra seems possible; and perhaps another and another in endless sequence flying to remoter and yet remoter islands, in emulation of the mystics' idea of unending refinement, never-concluded passage into purer spheres of being.

Not much is known about Fred Noonan, a slender drunk fired by Pan Am, except that Earhart didn't trust him. In these pages, too, he's a sketched, hermetic presence; but he is the Other to Earhart's Self, supplying a salting contrariness if spiritual intent threatens to overwhelm persuasive experience. Lovers eventually, the two of them are engaged in a idyll that has no stable state. It tilts continually this way and that, with bickering and romantic abrasion. Mendelsohn rather savors the proximity of the Hollywood versions of castaway romance—the same palm trees might serve as props for Hepburn as Earhart, Bogart as Noonan. But Mendelsohn is unsentimental: her lovers aim at edgy autonomy. Rather than happy endings, her two castaways feel, at the end of the book, the happiness of being "able to please themselves forever because they don't protect each other from their selfishness."

At times Mendelsohn falters. Sometimes the struts of irony bracing the idyll collapse and the novel crumples into a compliant swoon. Sometimes the tone strays. Earhart performing herself in Mendelsohn's third person ("The great heroine leans against a tree") can suddenly sound like Snoopy atop his doghouse ("The Red Baron is diving out of the sun!") But then poetic prose is a repeated gamble. Since even a short novel has almost as many components as a space shuttle, it ends up being evens or better that something will go wrong.

What goes right here is worth celebrating: repeated clusters of observations whose fresh accuracy one can only salute. The book is full of the exactitude of the newly seen. A day of Californian spring when "the afternoon light felt powdery, as if it might blow away" and "skirts of breeze" brushed Earhart's face. The legs of dead bugs "shriveled like morbid curlicues." Noonan, drunk in the navigator's cabin of the wrecked plane, "passed out with his face on an open map. His head lies in the Pacific like a dark eighth continent, and his long arms wrap around the ocean as if he were a sweetly uncoordinated god trying to scoop it up."

On the island, shadows of palm leaves move on the sand "like fish skeletons," the hot sea "rolls in folds like the back of a dog's neck"; off the doped side of the Electra, the sun reflects in "fruit-punch colors." And all these, in themselves tentative and lightly phrased specifics, are the members of a structure with its own curious rigor. Mendelsohn's narrative goes forward by revolving, counterpointing, reversing the set of selected figures by which she imagines Earhart (flying as fulfillment, as escape, as evasion, as illusion). She fugues through Earhart, subjecting the premise of the novel's beginning, that "I risked my life without living it," to the inversions and tense-shifts of the island where a heroine can outlive herself, until it resolves into an affirmation won by daring fingerwork from the expected story of death. "I believe in this life. I believe that it continues."

"The sky is flesh" is this novel's first line, and one of its chief figures. Mendelsohn makes Earhart see "the blue belly" above as several successive kinds of body. But outside the internal consistency of Mendelsohn's weave of imagining, is the sky really flesh, to heroes? You could make a case that heroes—and Earhart set out to be a female hero, not a heroine—are precisely people who choose to devote

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the greatest intensity of their lives to things other than those demanded by flesh, by the biological script of existence. Flying's greatest attraction might be the uncarnality of the air. It was part of Putnam's promotional shtick that Earhart looked like Lindbergh, "a Lady Lindy"; but it implied something different for a woman to want the sky than it did for Lindbergh. A woman might possess the same character as the male heroes of aviation, the same reticence concealing complete self-faith, the same set of superstitions designed to starve fate of oxygen. But she couldn't get out of the biological script just by rising up from the sticky ground into the thin air.

A woman taking to the bodyless heavens in the 1930s had an anatomy that was supposed to be her destiny. To make the same escape, she had in some sense to go against her own body, to become an exalted exception. It comes as no surprise that Amelia Earhart does not seem to have been enthusiastic about eating. She looked "like a bag of bones" in a swimsuit, someone said. But by refusing her own flesh's power to net her into childbearing and the forever-erasing actions of domesticity, she gained a body that felt more simply and uncodedly her own than many women's. Her sister Muriel remarked bitterly on the radio that Amelia looked much younger than her, because "taking care of a house and two children is more care, it would seem, than flying solo across the Atlantic." There were, too, small gains of corporeal freedom. As a consultant on careers for women at Purdue College, she liked to sit with her elbows on the table. "If Miss Earhart can do it, why can't we?" asked a student. "You can," replied the dean of women, "as soon as you fly the Atlantic."

Rather than a perpetual mounting into new thinnesses of the empyrean, flight ends with touchdown and a return to the regime of the ground; or with a crash and the reduction of the flyer to pure mashed body, just as the end of anorexia is indignity and confinement rather than angelic escape. But before her final "crack-up" (a term that brings together the crash of a plane and the crash of a consciousness) Earhart was able to inhabit her exceptional, perhaps untenable position, arrived at by the strange compromises of fame, in a way that carried the isolation of flying into other kinds of self-possession. For reading her speeches and letters is like finding a person who somehow contrived to dispense with a large proportion of the supposedly inevitable mental furniture of her age. The actual stances she took on sexual politics startle you less with their modernity than does the underlying degree of certainty that the speaker herself is a whole human subject, not a local embodiment of a compulsory femininity. She flew; through receptions and banquets she preserved the memory of having her existence under the sole control of stick and rudder. It is this aerial identity that Jane Mendelsohn has translated into the lightness of fiction.

The historical Earhart's regret seems to have been that her devil's bargain with her husband demanded so much touring and schmoozing and flesh-pressing for so little time flying; that there were so few hours of cloud and roaring silence between one airfield where people stared at her, and the next.

FRANCIS SPUFFORD is the author of *I May Be Some Time* (Faber).

TRB *continued from page 6*

his ideological deviations or because he was "not really a historian."

In 1992, Radosh finally retired from Queensborough and moved here. He worked for a year at the American Federation of Teachers but then began commuting to teach at Adelphi University in Long Island in a position funded by the Olin Foundation. When Adelphi and its president became entangled in scandal, Olin withdrew funding. I feared Radosh would be out of a job, but then I heard that Olin would fund a position for him in the history department at George Washington University. I figured that, at long last, he was going to end up in a history department at a real university.

But the left mounted a vigorous campaign against his hiring. Eric Foner of Columbia University, Roger Wilkins at George Mason and David Nasaw at the City University of New York weighed in. And an unsigned article turned up in the academic trade publication *The Chronicle of Higher Education* saying that "Mr. Radosh, a conservative scholar" was "courting" George Washington for a job in the history department but that "critics ... question his credentials."

I knew then that the jig was up—not because Radosh had been branded a rightist by these guardians of virtue but because most academic institutions recoil from public controversy. The next week, Radosh heard from the history department that he would not be appointed, after all.

When I called the reporter from *The Chronicle*, Courtney Leatherman, to find out why she described Radosh as a "conservative scholar" and who the critics questioning his credentials were, she wouldn't talk to me. "I do not want to be quoted in THE NEW REPUBLIC," she said. I did talk to Stephen Trachtenberg, the president of George Washington, who had initially courted Radosh rather than the other way around. He told me he believed that Radosh had been done an injustice and said he was trying to find a position elsewhere in the university for him. That's good news, but, as any dispassionate observer would acknowledge, Radosh belongs in a history department.

Radosh, as the historian Martin Sklar told me, is a victim of "left-wing McCarthyism." McCarthy attempted to discredit liberals by labeling them communists. He sometimes succeeded in getting them fired—not necessarily because their employers believed they were communists, but because they feared the publicity. It's an apt analogy but not one that would occur to the academic zealots of today's left, who, like their distant predecessors, are blinded by the light of their own self-righteousness.

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NEW HAVEN DIARIST

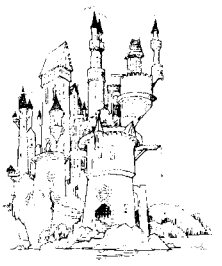
Grads

"CLOUD OVER YALE" PROCLAIMED the headline of *The New Haven Register*, in large blue letters against a white background, and, when I looked out the window, I did see a gray, gloomy sky and a steady drizzle. But weather wasn't the problem. Today was Memorial Day, the day of Yale's graduation exercises, and a cast of thousands—10,000 AFL-CIO members, according to some predictions—would be rolling into town to stage a counter-graduation, anti-Yale rally. They would be demonstrating in support of the Federation of University Employees, which represents Yale's secretarial staff, dining hall and maintenance workers. Those locals—34 and 35—had gone on strike earlier this spring (actually, less than half the members of local 34, which represents the clerical workers, joined in).

THE PROTEST'S FEATURED SPEAKER was to be the Reverend Jesse Jackson, who was calling it the "People's Commencement." The protesters planned to aim a large sound system at Yale's Old Campus (where graduation traditionally takes place) and drown out the conferring of honorary degree awards and of diplomas. "We have a shot at really screwing up the Commencement," a grounds maintenance worker and union member told a *Yale Daily News* columnist in late April.

THE GRADUATING SENIORS WERE indignant. "I cannot help but see this as a cynical public relations move on the part of the union leadership," declared student Susan Hayden in an article printed in *The Yale Daily News*. "Some of the people who will be graduating this May are the first in their families to attend college," she wrote, then asked the unions to "please, give us our day." The Yale administration floated a compromise: they would put union literature on every seat in the huge audience of Yale families and friends if the union called off the counter-Commencement demonstration. But AFL-CIO organizers, looking for national attention, dismissed the offer.

WHEN THE FACULTY, IN THEIR VARIously colored academic gowns, and the graduating students, in their black robes and Yale blue cowls, began massing on the Cross-Campus green, there was a sense of apprehension in the air. This morning's procession to the Old Campus would be a brief one. We were not following the usual Commencement route, which was longer, and took us directly through the New Haven green—but would instead walk along a city block adjacent to the green, where we would still face a crowd of hecklers and picketers. I braced myself for the encounter, but, to my surprise, we found nothing but a scraggly line of protesters. Most held yellow signs with black lettering, which read: "Yale Settle!" Some of the dissenters on the green shouted indecipherable slogans through bullhorns; but many of the Yale union members, who knew the students well and appeared embarrassed by what was happening, began clapping and cheering enthusiastically as the class of '96 went parading past.



THE LIGHT RAIN HAD now ended, and shafts of sunlight were appearing through the clouds. As we proceeded down the aisles, jampacked with eager family members scanning the procession for a glimpse of their own particular Yale graduate, I noticed what a remarkable assemblage this was. There were so many different kinds of faces, so many people of different colors and ethnic origins, people who seemed to hail from such disparate economic backgrounds and from all parts of the country and abroad. They had all gathered to applaud their children as they moved on to take their places in the adult world. (Much later, when I drifted over to attend the counter-Commencement on the green, I heard Jesse Jackson denounce Yale as an arrogant bastion of white male privilege. But in fact some 30 percent of this past year's Yale students are young men and women of color, and almost half of Yale undergraduates receive financial aid to the tune, on average, of $10,000 a year.)

THE ANTICIPATED DISRUPTION never happened. True, when Yale's sound system was turned on, there were several loud noises, which some people thought were firecrackers (actually, a band member had dropped his drum on the wiring). And, true, there were speeches made and loud rock music played on the adjacent green, but the thickness of the Yale buildings and the sound barriers of blue velvet cloth that had been erected reduced these noises to a distant rumble. As the ceremony got underway—perhaps it was due to a widespread sense of relief, or just because the sun had come out and stayed out—a feeling of lightheartedness and goodwill seemed to sweep the crowd. The exuberant shouts that accompanied the awarding of degrees to representative graduates of the various schools (Undergraduate, Graduate, Medical, Nursing, Law, etc.) sounded louder and more high-spirited than I'd ever heard them before.

WHEN THE DRAMA SCHOOL GRADuates came up to receive their degrees wearing round red clown's noses, the audience burst out laughing. When the Forestry students claimed their degrees wearing mortar boards adorned with large, leafy tree branches, waves of hilarity greeted them, too. One of the honorary degree recipients, the distinguished scientist Jack St. Clair Kilby, turned out to be as tall as a professional basketball player, and the short Yale official trying to place the blue cowl over Kilby's shoulders had to make a jump shot in order to do so.

THAT BROUGHT THE HOUSE down. But then, a short while later, when it was announced that Paul Simon was one of eight honorary degree recipients (preceded by the Yale band's rendition of "Me and Julio Down by the Schoolyard") the audience rose to give him a loud standing ovation. It was not until the closing benediction—offered by Victoria Matthews, a young alumna of the Yale Divinity school, who is the first female bishop of Canada—that we could hear competing voices. At that point the audience had grown completely silent, and we could hear the gravelly, familiar voice of Jesse Jackson rumbling along in the distant background. Then the silence ended, and the new graduates and their families began streaming out toward their various colleges and schools for second, smaller ceremonies, the awarding of student prizes and a celebratory lunch.

YALE'S 295TH COMMENCEMENT exercises had ended, and the best thing that had happened was that nothing—certainly nothing divisive enough to have merited a sound bite on the national news—had happened. The university's still-unresolved union/administration differences could move back to where they belonged, the negotiating table, and be worked upon in that venue, not by means of threats, rhetoric and street theater.

MAGGIE SCARF

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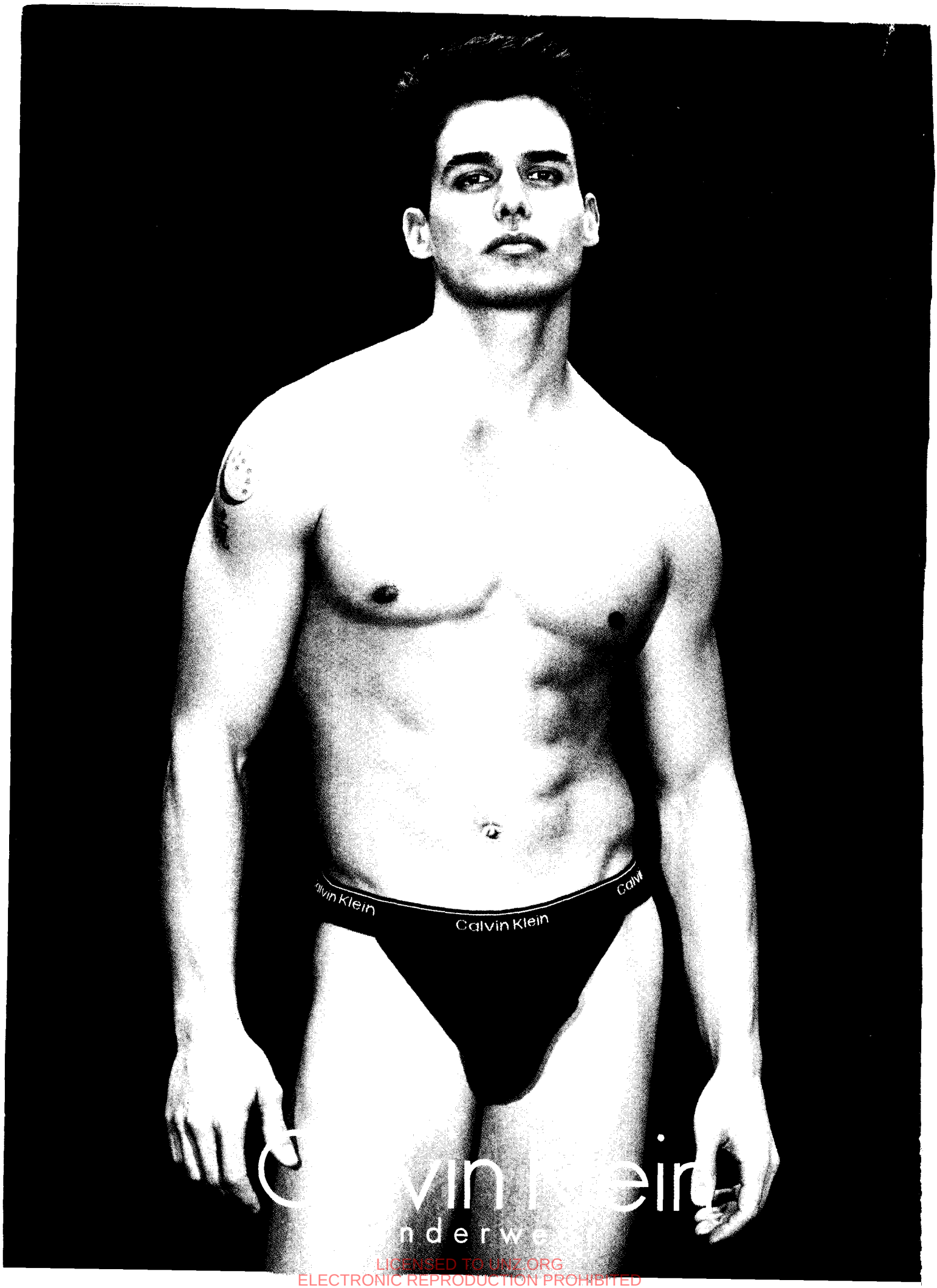

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